

HIGHLIGHT REPORT ON PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS ALTARNUN PRIMARY SCHOOL - 7TH JUNE 2017

The evening of 7th June 2017 began with a public meeting in the Altarnun Village hall. Altarnun Parish Council had invited Ms M McKeeman, Chief Operating Officer, ALAT and Ms K Dalton, Academy Principal Altarnun School and existing/potential parents and residents to meet with them to discuss recent developments at the Altarnun Primary School.

Ms McKeeman gave a brief presentation in which she introduced ALAT and reprised events following ALAT assuming responsibility for the community school on 1st June 2014. The school was in special measures on conversion at that time. The benefits of the change she said included the availability of advisors with the appropriate skill sets, training and experience; a clear reporting structure to ensure transparency with the clear identification of actions, responsibilities, outcomes & impact targeted at supporting areas of identified school improvement to be given open, independent review and rigorous challenge delegated to the recently formed Accountability Review & Challenge Group (ARC). The ARC group formally reports to the Trust Board. It has an independent Chair with a remit to hold the Regional Executive Principal to account, monitoring the school's performance & development/improvement progress, as well as providing support as, when & where required. She went on to describe the creation of a Drive Team within the school. With the Regional Executive Principal, these hold the academy Principal to account for driving school improvement. It reports to the ARC receiving information from the ARC and the academy development and self-evaluation plans. The Drive team give a voice for parents & the community within the school as it consists of parent, community as well as staff advisors. She was pleased to announce following an informal meeting with representatives of Altarnun Parish Council at half term, Councillor Rosalyn May had joined the Drive Team. Rosalyn stood and introduced herself saying she was available to hear from parents at any time. Her contact details are – rosamay161@hotmail.co.uk /telephone number 07871 394055. Applications to join the Drive Team can be made via Katie Dalton, Academy Principal, or via the school website – <https://altarnunprimary.org.uk>.

Ms McKeeman acknowledged that after a difficult start action had been tightly controlled and totally inwards focussed as the new management team assessed the inherited situation, offering support & training, determining improvement actions and then taking difficult decisions in-order-to implement necessary change. A new Principal had been appointed and by September 2017 there would be three new permanent and full-time teachers in place.

Ms Dalton introduced herself and explained that class rooms had been moved and decorated, a new library & assembly hall created and new gym and games equipment bought. The new academic year would see a greater emphasis on outdoor learning, maths and reading. In April, she had met with the Mayor and the Head Teacher from Gueltas, France, with a view to re-introducing a twinning-exchange visit in the summer of 2018. She said that currently the children in class 3 were working at producing their version of the musical Oliver Twist to be staged in the Altarnun Village School on 27th June 2017. She invited those present to come along. In answer to a question she said that a Parent Forum had also been introduced with volunteers representing the interests of children in each specific class group. She was open to ideas and suggestions and looked forward to working with parents and the community going forward.

Ms McKeeman concluded, saying as the improvement plans had been introduced and efforts to stabilise the learning environment for the children began to gain traction, the schools attention was now better able to turn outwards towards the wider community. There was a move toward greater parent engagement with pro-active two-way communication, open access opportunities and initiatives being introduced to encourage far greater involvement and participation. For example, she had offered the Parish Council the opportunity to stage a monthly meeting at the school to raise its profile and Ms Dalton now produced an article for the monthly TrePolPen Magazine letting residents as well as parents know what was happening in the school. She acknowledged that it had been a painful and turbulent journey especially around staffing and teaching standards. The immediate priority had been teaching standard improvement and the need to re-stabilise & re-invigorate the learning environment for the children. The priority now was to move towards wider community involvement built on greater parental engagement, re-establishing an academically successful school at the heart of the community. There followed a very lively and sometimes heated debate with residents and parents expressing deep dis-satisfaction with the school's poor performance and immense frustration with ALAT's inadequate contact, briefing and communication over the last three years. Ms McKeeman and Ms Dalton were criticised for not following the Parish Council's lead and publicising the meeting within the school with parents. The disbandment of the old Board of Governors was a real source of anger and little was known, or understood, about the proposed new governance structures – the ARC, Drive Teams & Parent Forums - supposedly designed to replace it. The inconsistency in teaching methods and frequent teaching staff changes was a cause for considerable anger and concern with parents expressing the same view evidenced in a recent Parental Feedback questionnaire, where 48% of existing parents said that they would not recommend the school to others. Parents said that the lack of visible improvement to date had seen children removed from the school and there was concern that if numbers continued to fall, the school could be vulnerable to closure. The parents pressed for news of when they would see feedback from an Ofsted and/or independent inspection. A visible demonstration that the situation was changing for the better was much needed. Suggestions on how the Principal could improve communications and establish greater engagement and involvement were made such as open days, coffee mornings, parent evenings, posters, newsletters with photographs etc. Parents and the Parish Council repeated time and time again that they wanted the school to succeed but they had felt exasperated, helpless, excluded and dis-enfranchised. The school representatives acknowledged the frustration being expressed and apologised for not being as open as parents had wanted about their initial impressions and planned changes. Recruitment and replacement of teaching staff had taken longer than anticipated and the internal focus was a result of the sheer scale of the issues inherited. Once again, they expressed the view that the position was now much improved and they were confident that planned changes would bring about the improvements everyone wanted. In conclusion, the Chair of the Parish Council thanked everyone for making the time to attend and share their concerns and opinions. He felt that the prospects for the school appeared to be more promising than many had expected but proof lay in demonstrable change. He asked Ms Mckeeman and Ms Dalton to come back to the November Parish Council meeting and update the Council and wider community on developments. In the meantime, he encouraged parents to seize on the invitation and opportunities presented to actively engage with Ms Dalton and the teaching staff to make the Altarnun Primary School a school the community could be proud of and a place where children would be encouraged and enjoy learning.