



Orchard Learning Alliance
Waingels Road
Woodley
Reading
Berkshire
RG5 4RF

15 May 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are enjoying the term so far and are looking forward to the upcoming break.

I am writing to you today to share that, after more than 40 years working in education, I have taken the decision to retire at the end of this academic year.



It has been an enormous privilege to serve as Chief Executive Officer of the Orchard Learning Alliance (OLA) since September 2022 and to help lead the creation and development of the Trust alongside such dedicated colleagues. What began as a shared vision between local schools has grown into a strong family of 10 schools serving almost 5,000 pupils and 700 colleagues across Wokingham and Reading, with further schools expected to join us in the coming years.

One of the achievements I am most proud of is that we remained true to our founding aim – creating a genuinely collaborative Trust, built by schools working together for the benefit of our children, families and communities. Establishing the OLA required determination, patience and partnership, and I remain incredibly grateful to the colleagues, families, governors and trustees who placed their trust in me to help guide that journey.

Many of you will also know me from my years at Waingels, first as Deputy Headteacher and then as Headteacher. I remain incredibly proud of the journey the school has been on and of the inclusive, ambitious and community-focused culture that thrives there today.

Throughout my career, I have always believed that schools are about people and relationships. I have been fortunate to work alongside exceptional staff – from teachers and teaching assistants to site teams, office staff, catering teams and cleaners – all of whom make an extraordinary difference to young people every single day. In a profession that is often asked to achieve so much with limited resources, I continue to be humbled by the commitment, care and resilience shown by school staff across our Trust.

While one of the realities of becoming a CEO is being slightly further removed from the day-to-day life of children in schools, moments such as the OLA Gold Awards earlier this week have reminded me exactly why our work matters. Seeing children and families from across our schools come together to celebrate achievement, belonging and personal growth has been truly inspiring and perfectly captures what the Orchard Learning Alliance stands for.

While this is a moment of personal reflection for me, it is also an exciting new chapter for the Orchard Learning Alliance. I am delighted to share that, to lead our schools and community into the future,

Sam Nowak has been appointed OLA's new Chief Executive Officer from 1 September 2026. Sam joins the OLA from a multi-academy trust in the southwest, where he is the CEO. Sam will also be supported by our new Chair of Trustees, Dave Williams, who has been at the heart of the OLA since it started, and Lucy Pillay, who joins us in June as our new Chief Financial Officer.

With these three appointments, alongside our existing team of brilliant colleagues, I leave knowing that the Trust, our schools, and our communities will go from strength to strength. The strength of the Orchard Learning Alliance has always been our people, shared values and our unwavering commitment to ensuring that every child is empowered to fulfil their potential, and I have every confidence that this will continue long into the future.

Thank you for your support over the many years. It has been a genuine privilege to serve you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'T Bartlett', with a large loop and a horizontal line extending to the right.

Tom Bartlett

Chief Executive Officer

Orchard Learning Alliance