

Dear Alma families,

I hope you had a good summer and a relaxing break. As we start the 2021-22 Academic Year at Alma Primary, I am writing to tell you about the suggested donation which the Governing Body is asking Alma families to give this year in Quality Contributions. I also want to remind you about the importance of these contributions to the running of the school, especially now, along with the impact that these donations have on the quality of the education that we are able to provide to your children.

This letter sets out:

- The level of Quality Contributions at Alma
- How free schools are funded
- Why Quality Contributions matter
- What to do next

## Quality Contributions for 2021-22

As many of you who joined us for our June Alma parents Q&A on the school Budget will recall, the school currently faces a structural deficit, unsustainable year over year. For this reason, for the current school year 2021-2022, the school Governors have recommended a Quality Contribution per child of £1,700. This works out as £170 per month for 10 months (September 2021 to June 2022 inclusive). Monthly direct debit is the easiest way to pay and is strongly encouraged. You can download a direct debit form from the Alma website [here](#) so do please fill it in, if you do not yet have a direct debit set up and return it to the school office.

As a voluntary charitable donation Quality Contributions are eligible for Gift Aid, which benefits the school further, since the school is then able to claim additional funding from the government on the basis of the donation. Again, you can download a Gift Aid form from the Alma website [here](#), so please also complete one of these if you have not yet done so and send this to our school business manager.

## How free schools are funded by the Department for Education:

Alma's core funding is provided by the Department for Education (DfE) on a per-child, per-year basis. The level of government funding allows the school to provide a basic and standard level of education.

At Alma we aim higher than this and to do that and, in common with other Jewish schools and an increasing number of non-Jewish schools, we rely on parents' generous financial support. Quality Contributions represent the largest element of the non-governmental income that we receive, a category that also includes funds from clubs and societies and other donations. Together, this forms approximately 30% of Alma's annual budget - money that is spent providing the high quality of education and support services that are offered to all children at the school.

We work extremely hard to spend all of our income wisely, with careful budget setting, tight internal controls and Governing Body scrutiny. We conduct regular monitoring and financial benchmarking against other schools both in the Jewish community and beyond. Alma's requested Quality Contribution level is in the lowest 25% of donations requested by Jewish schools.

As I am sure you are aware, this contribution is voluntary and your child will not be treated differently if you are unable to donate, however we anticipate and rely upon most parents being able and willing to contribute in full. We believe there is a strong moral obligation on all to give – if not the full suggested amount then as much as they can manage. We know there are differences in what families can afford,

and we are always willing to discuss different amounts in total confidence. Even a partial contribution, if that is all that you can give, is enormously helpful and embodies a sense of community responsibility for the education of the next generation, and models the habit of giving which is such a hallmark of the Jewish community.

If you have concerns or difficulties, please contact Rebecca Doctors, our School Business Manager, as soon as possible and in full confidence, either via the school office 020 8343 9988, or at [rdoctors@almaprimary.org](mailto:rdoctors@almaprimary.org).

## Why Quality Contributions matter?

The additional income we receive from Quality Contributions makes a material difference to our budgets, and therefore enables us to enhance our quality of education significantly, putting in place people and activities that create exceptional learning experiences for all children at Alma.

Perhaps understandably, since the start of the pandemic, receipts of all non-governmental income have fallen sharply - coinciding with a time when the school is facing substantially higher costs to maintain safe provision. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, our school's financial situation has worsened. While we understand everyone's situation is different, the macro-economic picture is looking brighter and our hope and anticipation is that donations will reflect this dynamic.

Unfortunately, Alma does not have either the local authority backing of other state schools, or the resources of private schools, so if our high-quality provision is to be maintained in the future we are more reliant than ever on the continued generosity of the whole school community.

### In our budget, we spend the money from Quality Contributions on:

- **A higher ratio of staff to pupils, benefiting every pupil, every day, significantly above the level allowed for in our DfE grant.** This means we have more capacity to run 1:1 (individual) and small group work for children who need to be stretched, as well as those who need extra support. The level of adult support at Alma puts us in the top 10% of schools nationally for this.
- **Small classes for reading and writing.** Every Alma child learns reading and writing (Phonics) in a small group, normally with a 1:8 ratio of teacher to children, four days a week.
- **Additional interventions to support children.** Children at Alma benefit from interventions to support their learning and wellbeing. We currently employ a member of staff to lead this, but limitations on our main budget mean that this vital work can only continue because of Quality Contributions.
- **Subsidising school security now that the government has reduced the amount provided.** We have a significant shortfall in the amount provided by the UK government for security and the costs of two guards during the school day, a safeguard as important as ever due to the heightened alert level following recent events. This shortfall is made up from Quality Contributions.
- **Developing and resourcing our school.** 2021 will only our third year of being a full school, and we have realised over the past two years that we have greater pressure on space, especially for interventions. We now need to create additional storage and teaching space around the school to manage this.
- **Training for staff.** We give staff extensive opportunities for training in a range of areas including curriculum, wellbeing and higher education. Quality Contributions mean that this work can continue despite the pressure on our budget.
- **Provision of Ivrit and Jewish Learning lessons.** Primary school language learning provides a benefit for a child's brain development and prepares them for subsequent language learning. At Alma children have over 2 and half hours per week of Ivrit teaching, normally in groups of 15 or smaller.

As we explain in our school ethos, we aim to ensure that every child at Alma develops passion, appreciation, and respect for Judaism as well as for other religions and cultures.

- **Technology and resources that make learning as stimulating and engaging as possible.** Over the past year we have installed new laptops for children and staff, and ensured that our technology is as robust as necessary for blended learning with some or all children attending classes remotely. We now need to start replacing some older class technology, including interactive screens and iPads, as this equipment becomes redundant, something we will only be able to afford through the Quality Contributions made by parents.
- **Subsidising school trips and visitors, so that more are possible in every school year.** Our curriculum is enriched with trips and visitors, which we expect and hope to resume as normal in 2021-22. While we ask parents to help with these, we also use some of the money contributed by families to subsidise these, or to pay for visitors who come into school and which we could not otherwise afford.

## What should you do now?

- **Step 1: Complete a Direct Debit form.** Monthly Direct Debit is the easiest way for parents to make contributions as a one-time task that also reduces the school's administration costs. Please click [here](#) to download the mandate form and return it to the school office. Other payment options are available\*.
- **Step 2: Complete a Gift Aid form.** As Alma is a registered charity, if you pay tax and complete the Gift Aid form the school can benefit by receiving additional funds from the government. If you are a UK taxpayer and have not done so in previous years, please download and complete a Gift Aid Declaration [here](#) and return it to the school office. Higher-rate taxpayers may also be eligible for tax relief if they include their Quality Contributions in their annual tax return.
- **Step 3: Return both completed forms to the school office** or email a photo or scanned copies to [rdoctors@almaprimary.org](mailto:rdoctors@almaprimary.org).

Thank you very much in advance for your support for Alma and I wish you a healthy and happy Jewish New Year.

Best wishes,

**Ilan Jacobs**

Chair

Alma Primary Governing Body

*\*You can also donate Quality Contributions termly (£567 per child per term) or annually via Parent Pay, or by standing order or cheques – further information is on the school website [here](#) ([www.almaprimary.org](http://www.almaprimary.org) under 'Families/Donations to Alma').*