FCAT
The best we can be

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Dear parents/carers

We are writing to provide you with an update following a ransomware attack in September 2024 which affected Fylde Coast Academy Trust's IT infrastructure.

As you know, we have been working with our cyber security response team and the North West Regional Organised Crime Unit to investigate the ransomware attack. We now understand that the hackers responsible for carrying out the attack have leaked the Trust's data on the dark web.

What information has been affected?

Our cyber security response team is currently reviewing the Trust data which has been leaked on the dark web. The investigation indicates that a few of our schools have been affected and some pupil information will have been leaked. This includes email addresses, details of pupil premium status, pupil support needs and free school meal status. On its own, the information that has been accessed from our IT systems is very unlikely to pose any risk of identity fraud, identity theft or other risks associated with a cyber-attack. However, if this information is combined with other information available online then the risk of identity fraud may increase.

Our investigation currently shows that not all of our schools and not all of our pupils have been affected, however we are notifying all parents and carers of this update so that we can all take steps to reduce the risk of identity fraud or theft and remain vigilant.

Our investigation has shown no evidence that the affected information is publicly available online through traditional search engines. Our cyber security response team have assured us that accessing the leaked information on the dark web is highly challenging due to the nature of dark web infrastructure. The affected data is not indexed like it would be on traditional websites and requires specialised tools to navigate hidden services. Additionally, download speeds on the dark web are significantly slower making it time-intensive to retrieve large datasets. This complexity, combined with the technical barriers of accessing and navigating the dark web, means that the affected information is not readily available or accessible to the general public.

What are we doing?

We are still working with our cyber security response team and the police to investigate the ransomware attack. We notified the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and the National Cyber Security Centre of the attack when it occurred in September. We have engaged with the ICO during the course of our investigation and can confirm that the ICO has informed us that it will not be taking any regulatory action against the Trust.

What steps can you take?

We are writing to you all again to remind you that there are certain steps pupils can take to protect themselves from the risk of identity fraud, including:

- Changing passwords for any accounts where the same password is used as the one used to the access the trust's IT system.
- Ensure that passwords are not re-used passwords across important accounts in future.
- Ensure passwords are strong and unique and are not easy to guess.
- Enable two-factor authentication across all important accounts where this is available.
- Be alert for phishing emails and text messages – messages where the sender is prompting you to click links or enter your details.

Further advice on using passwords to protect your data and spotting and reporting suspicious correspondence is available from the National Cyber Security Centre.

What happens now?

As our investigation begins to conclude, our systems have now been fully restored and the ransomware has been completely removed. If any further steps need to be taken at a later date, we will communicate this to you.

The Trust has a Data Protection Officer (DPO) to advise us on our obligations under data protection law. The Trust's DPO is Peter Montgomery. If you have any concerns relating to data protection, you can contact our DPO by emailing dpo@fcat.org.uk.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support.

Dean Logan

CEO