



Summer 2021 - Issue 10

SIGMA NEWS

For the Staff and Stakeholders of The Sigma Trust

Greater than the sum of its parts



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Building work expands secondary capacity
- 40 industry accolades for Trust
- How we handled transition
- Update on our strategic leads

Welcome...

Welcome to the latest edition of Sigma News, containing a wide range of articles which celebrate what we have achieved together.

The academic year of 2020-21 was, without doubt, one of the most challenging years for us all. It is fair to say that this time last year we were starting to think about the light at the end of the tunnel and a return to some form of normality in the autumn – how wrong could we have been? The pressure felt from the continued spectre of Covid-19 contributed to a difficult and relentless year.

The new year 2021-22 has started and will bring its own challenges with the return of inspections, examinations and the ongoing Covid-19 testing. We have had to, and we will continue to, adapt to the world we are in – we must remember the children and young people in our care deserve the very best and we must, therefore, ensure the future is one of hope and reassure them that they are not a lost generation.

I would like to congratulate you for the amazing job you continue to do while juggling everything that life has thrown at you over this period.



The middle of September marked 18 months since the start of the first lockdown and it is to your credit that you have continued to strive to put children and young people at the heart of everything you do. Please take a moment to read through this edition of Sigma News which goes somewhere to acknowledge your exceptional commitment and work.

*Lyn Wright, CEO,
The Sigma Trust*

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Trust sweeps the board at industry awards

The efforts of teachers, support staff and teams have resulted in more than 40 industry accolades.

Schools within the Trust attracted a high number of nominations in this year's Essex Teaching Awards.

Nominations include –

Teaching and non-teaching staff in primary school

Alton Park Junior School – *Emma Preston*

Monkwick Junior School – *Georgia Hughes, Lara Nathie, Malcolm Price*

Teaching and non-teaching staff in secondary school

Clacton County High School – *Bethany Cotton, Elizabeth Merrell, Chris Taylor*

The Colne Community School & College – *Janice Alphonse-Sivas, Ben Cooksley, Greg Dawson, Chris Fox, Jenny Fry, Sam Hensley, Rowena Lee, Theresa McAndrew, Maxine Meyer, Sophie Reuben, Layla Sharpe*

Harwich and Dovercourt High School – *Sarah Davies-Llewellyn, Belinda Gosling*

Philip Morant School and College – *Emma Booth*

St Helena School – *Jessica Bailey, Russell Hardy, Bellah Horn, William James, Lorraine Osman, Sonia Pearson, Claire Wild*

The Stanway School – *Guy Buckman, David Castro, John Hiskey, Anastasia Nikoloudi, Charlie Rivers, Alana Watt*

The Thomas Lord Audley School – *Lisa Brown, Rebecca Rees, Kevin Rowland, Lindsey Wright*

Whole teams and entire schools

Clacton County High School – inclusion team

The Colne Community School & College – Thrive Provision, pastoral team

Harwich and Dovercourt High School – NQT team

Paxman Academy – pastoral team

St Helena School – senior leadership team, administration, Modern Foreign Languages, pastoral team

The Stanway School – administration team

The Thomas Lord Audley School – site team

Lyn Wright, The Sigma Trust CEO, said: "These award nominations are testimony to the very many good people we have working in our Trust and within Sigma schools. These 40 nominations represent the very many more people and teams within our Trust doing just the same, day in, day out. I am so very proud of each and every one of them."

Building for a bright future

Work continues to expand Clacton County High School to cater for an increase in population. Work includes providing a four-court sports hall, gym and six extra classrooms.

Chris Taylor, head of school, said: "At Clacton County High, we continually

plan for the future, aiming to drive up standards and improve outcomes for all of the children in the local area. This includes improvements to the school site and environment.

"This is a very exciting opportunity for the school."



Extra space for growing school

Students are eagerly awaiting the official opening of their new school block. Work has been taking place at The Colne Community School & College to add eight new classrooms and four design technology rooms, including purpose-built metalwork

and woodwork rooms and food technology classes.

The planned opening is for the end of November.

Internal work to the older buildings will take place to improve functionality and student

flow around the building.

There are also plans for a complete renovation and expansion of the kitchen and refectory area to ensure there is enough seating and facilities for the expanding year groups.

Returning to new-look classrooms

Over the summer, classrooms at Monkwick Infant School and Nursery were fully refurbished. The transformation of Year 1 and 2 classrooms was part of ongoing Trust improvement works and brings the classrooms in line with the newer EYFS building

already in place. The revamp included new carpets, sink areas and doors, as well as an upgraded IT system.

Headteacher Claire Holmes said: "After some really difficult times, this will really lift morale for everyone to be in such a positive learning environment."

A NEW WEBSITE HAS BEEN LAUNCHED FOR CLACTON COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL
Optimised for desktop and mobile devices, the site features updated pages from the previous website, as well as new features such as a rotating carousel highlighting latest information and news. Visit [countyhigh.org.uk](https://www.countyhigh.org.uk)

Transition....back to school after lockdown

With the partial closure of schools lasting for many weeks at a time, schools have had to work hard to enable children to settle back into the classroom.

Here's a flavour of how our Sigma colleagues helped to ease the transition back to school after lockdown...

The Thomas Lord Audley School

Work started in September to help students to return to school and to support their mental health, including extra time with tutors and increased drop-in support sessions.

Simon Essex, headteacher:

"I am extremely proud of our students; despite all they have been through, the vast majority have returned to school, settled into a completely different way of working and are getting on with it brilliantly."

"I am also really proud of our staff who always go above and beyond to help our young people. The pandemic has provided a very clear example of how much my staff care about our students. The additional support we arranged for students on their return has helped them to adapt and to be able to cope with all they have been through."

Monkwick Infant School and Nursery

Teachers carried out close observations and ongoing assessments to ensure the best recovery curriculum was provided for pupils. Work was done around PSHE to give pupils a chance to talk through their experiences, giving focus to vocabulary, speaking and listening. Attention has also been given to helping pupils to reform

friendships, looking at kindness and boundaries.

Claire Holmes, headteacher:

"Children have just loved being back in school. They needed to be with their friends and were more than ready for some structure."

"We benefit from established practices in metacognition, growth mindset and mindfulness. The children have needed lots of this."

"Gradually, we have been able to do more formal assessment, so our curriculum next year provides opportunity and challenge to enable all children to thrive once more."

Clacton County High School

Students were given extra time with their tutors on return to the classroom to familiarise themselves with the new protocols in place. They were given tours of the new-look specialist lessons – such as music and drama – and accompanied to and from classes. Extra assemblies were given on managing anxiety, an external company employed to support with mental health and extra counselling sessions made available.

Sandy Tate, deputy headteacher

"We monitored the mental health and wellbeing of our students via a weekly review meeting of key staff."

"Having said that, we also felt our children needed some sense of normality back into their lives in order to counteract some of the concerns they had. So, in that sense, we tried to maintain as normal a school life for them as possible given the Covid-19 restrictions."

Summer School...

Summer school has traditionally given young people an opportunity to familiarise themselves with their new school, to meet their teachers and make new friends. How did summer school look this year, amid the pandemic?

The Thomas Lord Audley School

A two-week summer school was planned with a focus on wellbeing and increasing students' confidence to start secondary school, as well as developing knowledge in literacy and numeracy.

Simon Essex, headteacher:

"Students experienced lessons with our English, maths and science teachers, as well as having lots of taster lessons in a wide range of our other subjects."

We also included team building and personal challenge activities."

The Stanway School

Activities based on a "survival" theme encouraged incoming Year 7 students to collaborate and familiarise themselves with the site and facilities.

The first day saw students form a coalition to respond to the mock crisis of being stranded at school. Each day, activities incorporated numeracy and literacy, humanities, arts and sport.

The head of Year 7 and a broad range of teaching staff were on hand during the week to get to know their students and help them to settle in.

Charlotte Beck Hansen-Spurr, acting senior progress leader:

"This cohort in particular, like those across the

Transition...into and out of our schools

The end of the academic year is a time for transition, both into school and out of school as young people take the first, next or last steps on their education journey.

With pandemic restrictions still looming, what did transition look like across the Trust this year?

Sigma Sixth Tending

Year 11 have been welcomed into sixth form with a series of virtual masterclasses in their chosen subjects. Year 13 leavers received individual career sessions to prepare them for university, employment, training or apprenticeships. Support ranged from crafting covering letters to applying for student loans.

Sarah McKarry, head of college

"These bridging activities are designed to ensure students feel prepared to embrace the challenges of their next steps. They are ready and excited to start a new chapter in their lives."

The Thomas Lord Audley School

Putting the safety of all young people first, the face-to-face aspect of the end of year transition had to be cancelled. With 170 pupils joining from 20 primary schools, it would have been difficult to keep everyone safe and within the restrictions.

Simon Essex, headteacher:

"We visited pupils in their primary schools and worked with their teachers to acquire vital knowledge to help support them from their very first day. We provided a virtual presentation for parents and carers, as well as actively encouraging students to attend our transition summer school."

"We also set aside the first day of term in September where only Year 7 were in attendance, allowing us to complete some of the activities we usually do on our transition days."

Harwich and Dovercourt High School

Year 6 pupils were able to take part in taster days

in their school bubbles, adhering to social distancing measures.

Simon Garnham, senior assistant headteacher:

"The visit was split over two days to reduce the pressure of numbers, but a wide selection of experiences were still on offer."

"Pupils were also able to return to the school for summer school in August. In the evening, parents were invited to join an online presentation by the headteacher and head of Year 7."

Monkwick Infant School and Nursery

Outdoor stay and play sessions enabled pupils joining in September and their parents to settle in to the school and to meet their teachers. Year 2 pupils were able to meet their new teachers over Zoom, before small group outdoor activities.

Claire Holmes, headteacher:

"There has been lots of transition talk between teachers ensuring the needs of all pupils are met and that they move happily between schools."

Clacton County High School

Visits to primary schools enabled teachers to liaise regarding pupils with special educational needs. The SEND team met with all primary school SENDCos to discuss the children moving up to secondary school.

Pupils and their parents were able to attend meetings to ease worries and concerns about the transition. Those with the highest needs have visited the school in small groups for an induction and to receive a welcome pack to familiarise themselves with structures, procedures, expectations and staff.

Helen Bartrum, SENDCo

"A presentation has been included on the transition site for those parents of children with SEND which also gives a tour of the inclusion hub and answers questions they may have about SEND support."

country, have had much disruption to their education and we chose to accommodate both academic and social elements into our summer school. More than ever, we hoped to create a real sense of what it means to be part of The Stanway School community.

"We hoped having a broader insight into how we do things here would promote confidence and allow the Year 7s to join us in September with a sense of pride in our standards, and maybe a few friendly faces to spot in the corridors, too."

Clacton County High School

Summer school saw the new Year 7 cohort try out music, science, English, PE, food technology, art, Spanish, history and business lessons. They were also given the opportunity to visit the zoo.

Sean Duffy, head of V16 Partnership:

"We invited all 308 Year 6 into Year 7 pupils for the week-long summer school, focusing largely on transition and catch-up. They had the opportunity to meet most of their year group, speak with many teachers and get to know their way around school."

Trainees complete training during pandemic

A group of 65 trainees have qualified as teachers during the last academic year.

With restrictions in place, the trainees had to complete much of their work remotely, with lessons observed online.

This year's training was delivered with a more blended approach, with school experience and Continued Professional Development, centre based small group work and online live training and modules.

Training assessment tutor Leah Green said: "We have also tailored the programme to suit the changes and had our Zoom door open for anyone who just wanted a chat or some reassurance."

Trainees have still gained vital experience in the

classroom, despite the partial closures of schools, developing extra skills with technology and online lessons.

Practical training sessions were rethought, with tasks evidenced with photographs and feedback given over Zoom.

Trainee assessment tutor Angela Rees said: "It was a mountain to climb and we did it, planting the NETT flag in success."

Secondary programme leader Jane Adamson said: "Covid-19 has made us think outside the box when it comes to giving our trainees the best high quality learning that we can."

Many of the newly qualified teachers are going on to teach in local schools.

Class of 2021...NETT Teacher Training Awards

This year's trainees celebrated with an awards ceremony during a socially distanced picnic at the Tendring Education Centre. And the winners are...



**The Award for Academic Excellence –
REBEKAH FRANCIS**

"This year has been a very steep, but very enjoyable learning curve. Getting an award was a brilliant way to end it."

**The Award for Academic Excellence –
ALFRED SMITH**

"To be recognised for my efforts by NETT was a great feeling. I look forward to starting as a newly qualified teacher in an extremely rewarding profession."



**The Award for Outstanding Progress –
SHANNEN PARSONS**

"It's lovely that my progress has been noticed and that I was chosen to be awarded. I'm so pleased I am now a qualified teacher. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for me."



**The Award for Outstanding Progress –
MICHAELA ANTONIOU-GARCIA**

"I am extremely grateful for the recognition NETT have given me; it makes all the hard work worth it. I am so excited to start my job

in September. Teaching is already, without a doubt, the best thing I have ever done."

**The Award for Outstanding Progress -
ALEX WOOTTON**



**The Award for Most Inspiring Trainee Teacher -
CHARLOTTE GOFF**

"I've absolutely loved my time training to be a teacher and I can't wait to get started with my own Reception class in

September. Knowing what I've achieved this year makes me even more motivated to give these children the most fun and inspiring education I can throughout my career."



**The Award for Most Inspiring Trainee Teacher -
ALICE HORNSBY**



**The Award for Most Inspiring Trainee Teacher -
FRANK BOWYER**

"Being connected with my students and listening to the music they love has shaped my outlook and beliefs for the better."

UPDATES FROM...STRATEGIC LEADS

Read about the work of the strategic leads during the pandemic...



Finlay Ridgwell, Maths

Remote learning has been a challenge for all, but the sharing of ideas and resources enabled good practice to continue throughout maths.

The maths team worked together on how best to assess and engage with "knowledge checks" and the "maths calendars" becoming an excellent working tool.

With the Ofsted Research Review recently published, it gives the maths team more focus to make sure knowledge is rooted in schemes of learning.

This will guarantee the core concepts in maths are clear and evident to students, with stretch and support where needed.

Grade 9 Masterclasses continued remotely, alongside professional development opportunities for teachers.

We also worked closely with external partners, including the Venn Maths Hub, on areas such as maths anxiety and mastery, so all students achieve their potential.



John Knights, Science

Despite restrictions, our Science Fact competition was a success, with students researching and suggesting their most interesting piece of information.

The winning entry, from Harwich and Dovercourt High School, was: "According to quantum physics, if you removed every particle and amount of energy from the Universe there would still be energy remaining – called the zero-point energy."

The fact was used to promote engagement in science.

A programme of subject specific enhancement focused on physics to support teachers who want to develop their knowledge and understanding of science outside of their normal specialism area.

The two twilight sessions and three full days of training gave an opportunity to delve into the theory behind the subject content of the GCSE programme of study and gave staff the chance to experience practical elements.



Fiona Cook, English

Reading is a Trust priority. We support colleagues through professional development opportunities and courses, as well as sharing best practice. The

culmination of this work, wider research and evidence has led to the Trust putting in place a Universal Approach to Reading.

The Trust Thursday virtual CPD event in June with Ruth Everett, FCCT, SLE in management, English and literacy education consultant and school improvement partner, focused on using clear and shared language of reading and how this strategy of consistent and explicit teaching of reading across all subject specialisms will enable learners to become successful and strategic readers.

We will work closely with reading leads to support the implementation of our Universal Approach to Reading.

The next phase of our reading journey will be close collaboration with reading and literacy leads to develop effective strategies and approaches to both the assessment of reading, and how to support our learners to develop their wider vocabulary to close the vocabulary gap which remains a primary concern of many research papers due to Covid-19.



Ross Thorpe, MFL

A consultation was carried out into the proposed reduction in the amount of vocabulary students are expected to learn for exams.

Ofsted also released their research review which identified potential barriers to MFL learning and highlighted the importance of building a curriculum around the core areas of phonics, grammar and vocabulary.

We will be looking at the details of this research review and working to ensure best practice when delivering the MFL curriculum. In our subject enhancement session in July, MFL departments looked at ways to bring phonics and grammar into the fabric of each lesson, so students can constantly build their skills and master key language.

MFL departments shared ideas and good practice during remote learning, so it will be exciting in September to collaborate on ways we can overcome some of the obstacles identified by Ofsted, supporting all students to feel a sense of achievement in their language learning.



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