



Summer 2020 - Issue 8

SIGMA NEWS

For the Staff and Stakeholders of The Sigma Trust

Greater than the sum of its parts



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- SIGMA CEO RETIRES FROM POST
- DOORS OPEN AT SIGMA SIXTH
- OFSTED VISITS UNDER NEW FRAMEWORK
- SCHOOLS MAKE AND DONATE PPE

Welcome...

Welcome to what, for me, will be the last edition of Sigma News that I will introduce. It is also a very unique edition. Usually, it is full of celebration of what has been achieved in the 12 schools across the Trust over the past six months. While there are elements of that in the next few pages, not surprisingly it is dominated by how all of you have coped with the issues around Covid-19.

THANK YOU

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your dedication and commitment to all pupils during these challenging four months. Despite what is often reported in the press, schools have not been shut, they have been open for the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils throughout that time, including the Easter break and the May half-term.

Since June, all schools have seen a significant increase in pupils returning to schools in a wide range of year groups and staff have managed that safely and effectively. At the same time, you have continued to deliver high quality home learning for all students to help to reduce the inevitable impact the pandemic will have on their education.

I also know that so many of you have gone beyond what has been asked of you by making PPE for the NHS and other key workers, delivering food parcels to those in need and



continuing to communicate with families in challenging circumstances. Thank you for everything you have achieved.

CONGRATULATIONS

It was great to see two colleagues I worked with at Clacton County High School for 21 years being recognised for their lifetime achievement in education - many congratulations to Viv and Louise; it was thoroughly deserved.

Congratulations also to Luella at The Stanway School who, once again, are winners in the new teacher category.

UNIQUE PARTNERSHIP

Finally, I must end by thanking you for all of your support since your school joined The Sigma Trust. I believe over the past four years we have created a unique partnership built on collaboration between schools, not on unnecessary competition, with the key aim of no child left behind.

I know that Sigma will continue to go from strength to strength under Lyn Wright's leadership and I wish her every success.

All the best for the future and try to enjoy a relaxing summer holiday.

*Jeff Brindle,
CEO The Sigma Trust*

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CEO retires after 40 years in education

In the midst of a national school lockdown is not how anyone anticipates retiring from a lifelong career in education.

But, for Jeff Brindle, that has been the reality of his final weeks as CEO of The Sigma Trust after 40 years in teaching.

Mr Brindle, who will continue to work for the Trust two days per week, set up the Trust after stepping down as full-time headteacher at Clacton County High School in 2015. The Trust now looks after 12 primary and secondary schools in north Essex, making it the largest multi-academy trust working solely within the county.

He said: "What I am most proud of is that I can

genuinely say that every school is stronger now than when they joined Sigma. Huge credit goes to all staff within those schools, of course.

"But, the fact we have been able to work together and provide additional capacity and support has been particularly evident to me in what we have seen during this crisis.

"It has been my job to establish the Trust and grow it for the last five years, making it the strongest it can be.

"Whatever happens, the Trust has always been about turning education into something that's not about a single school, but about the whole community."

THE SIGMA TRUST JOURNEY...

SEPTEMBER 2016 - The Sigma Trust formed by Clacton County High School, St Helena School, The Stanway School, Thomas Lord Audley School, Monkwick Infant School and Nursery, Monkwick Junior School

JUNE 2017 - Harwich and Dovercourt High School joined the Trust

APRIL 2018 - The Sigma Trust announced as the preferred sponsor for a brand-new school to be built on the Alderman Blaxill School site

JANUARY 2019 - Colne Community School and College and Philip Morant School and College rebrokered and joined the Trust

SEPTEMBER 2019 - The newly-built Paxman Academy opened on the Alderman Blaxill School site

OCTOBER 2019 - Alton Park Junior School and Holland Park Primary School rebrokered and joined the Trust

Former head of education for Essex to take over the reins

Director of standards Lyn Wright is being promoted into the role of CEO from September.

Mrs Wright joined The Sigma Trust in February 2019 as director of standards, having worked in secondary schools and pupil referral units for 22 years and, more recently, Local Authority. She will continue to work closely with retiring CEO Jeff Brindle after September, when Mr Brindle takes on a part-time role within the organisation.

Mrs Wright, who previously held the role of head of education and early years for Essex Local Authority, said: "We feel it is a really sensible approach for Jeff to stay on within the Trust as there is an awful lot of anxiety and an awareness there is a lot of change happening due to the Coronavirus that will last for quite some time. This way, we can keep some stability among the schools and lead the staff through these changing times."

"There will be a lot more short-term focus while



we are in this situation with the virus before we can move to the longer-term developments. But, there are things that are business as usual. There are still good things which had been planned that have continued, which provide us with positive priorities. That is nice as it is not just all about Coronavirus."

Projects Mrs Wright and Mr Brindle continue to work on include building and expansion work at their schools and the

launch of the Sigma Sixth provision for sixth formers in north Essex.

Mrs Wright is also looking to grow the primary arm of the Trust and develop the organisation in terms of recruitment, retention and career pathways for all staff.

She said: "Sigma is a young Trust that has come a long way in a short amount of time. Now, it is about building on that and taking the Trust into the next phase. I see myself as the next guardian."

Sigma Sixth prepares to open its doors

The first cohort of students are being welcomed to the new Sigma Sixth Colchester Campus this September.

Building on the foundations of the former Philip Morant Sixth Form College, the aim is to create a vibrant and progressive sixth form centre. The newly refurbished post-16 provision includes new chairs, new computers and a spacious environment.

The sixth form offers a wide range of A-level and BTEC courses for students on different pathways, whether via university, higher level or degree level apprenticeships or employment. There will be opportunities open to students, including work experience and an extended enrichment programme enabling students to take part in activities alongside their courses.

Sigma Sixth also includes a new sports college, using the facilities at The Northern Gateway.

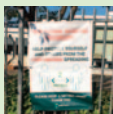


Scott Holder, executive headteacher, said: "Our sixth form provision has a proven track record of high achievement and our staff, including a full-time careers advisor, work hard to ensure our young people are ready to move onto the next stage of their education, training or work.

"All students will have the opportunity to carry out a work experience placement at the end of their first year and we encourage students to take part in volunteer work, charity work and to act as mentors to younger students.

"We cannot wait to welcome our new students."

Vital site work during Coronavirus crisis



Schools have been transformed to ensure the safety of children and staff as they return after the Coronavirus shutdown. During the crisis, the estates teams have fully prepared

schools with additional signage, re-positioning of classroom furniture, enhanced cleaning programmes and additional cleaning areas throughout each site. All reception areas have had alterations made to ensure safety of staff and pupils.

Headteachers have developed robust risk assessments covering all aspects of safety in relation to reopening, including staggered start and finish times, dedicated drop-off and pick-up points and the implementation of social 'bubbles'. Despite the crisis, building and improvement work has continued –

- Thomas Lord Audley School – windows and curtain walling areas replaced before September, funded by the School Condition Allocation budget and delivered by Abacus Build UK. A first phase classroom refurbishment also due to take place.
- Harwich and Dovercourt High School - £1.5m refurbishment of the science department under way, including demolishing a failing part of the

existing building and a significant extension to provide modern, purpose-built laboratories. T J Evers are delivering this project, with completion due by September.

- The Philip Morant School and College – significant technology and music department refurbishment, due for completion by September.

All building working is being delivered under strict Covid-19 social distancing parameters.

Brian Markham, chief operations and finance officer, said: "Behind the scenes, we have worked tirelessly with contractors and relevant authorities to keep as much of the building work and renovations on track to ensure our schools are in the best possible condition and to keep moving forward to improve the learning environment.

"The site teams have worked very hard to put the Covid-19 measures in place to keep staff and students safe. Alongside this, the admin and finance teams throughout the Trust have been working to implement the free school meal voucher scheme and ensure parents and staff are communicated with regularly. The IT teams have been supporting with home working and distance learning and all the support functions have been working flexibly and responding quickly to the constantly changing guidelines."

Technology and music block refurbishment

Creative students will return to school to find enhanced technology and music facilities.

The Philip Morant School and College is undergoing a technology and music department refurbishment ahead of September. In technology, workshops are being reconfigured, providing enlarged workspaces to deliver the new curriculum. Food workshops will include more sinks and cookers, new units and an improved layout.

Dawn Cooke, subject leader technology, said: "We are very excited about these upgrades, which reflect the curriculum change from the traditional woodwork and metal work to that of a subject based on the design process and manufacture of products in all materials."

Multifunctional classrooms in the refurbished music block will enable students to access music technology in every lesson. All classrooms and performance spaces will be linked to maximise the use of all practise rooms, creating a hub.

Essex Teaching Awards for Sigma colleagues

Three colleagues have been recognised for their work within The Sigma Trust schools.

The Essex Teaching Awards aim to recognise and celebrate the inspirational work that takes place in the county's schools. The awards in February saw colleagues from The Stanway School and Clacton County High School celebrated...

New Teacher of the Year – Luella Murray, The Stanway School



Highly Commended - Lifetime Achievement Award - Viv Dundon, Clacton County High School

Highly Commended - Lifetime Achievement Award - Louise Horton, Clacton County High School



Competition helps to link science to the world

Students and staff across The Sigma Trust are finding evidence of science in the world around them as part of a competition.

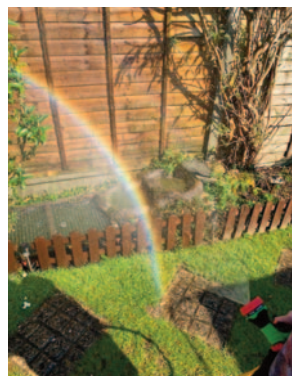
For the third year, the Sigma science photography competition has been launched across all Trust schools.

John Knights, Sigma strategic science lead, said: "Students and staff have been asked to submit their own photographs with an explanation of how their picture links to science. This has led to some very creative

lockdown photographs.

"The competition helps students to link their science home-schooling to the world around them in and around their homes. It reinforces the fact that science is not just found in books or on the internet, but can be found everywhere."

The competition deadline has been extended to the autumn when a champion entry from each school will receive a gift voucher and an overall winner will be given an action camera.



Secondary school remains Good, Ofsted confirms

The Thomas Lord Audley School has been confirmed as a Good school by Ofsted.

Inspectors issued the school with its first report under the new framework in February, after first issuing the same grading in 2016.

The report stated: "This is a supportive school and parents and carers value the work of the school. They speak positively about leaders and of teachers who 'go the extra mile'."

The school is the first within The Sigma Trust to

achieve Good under the new Ofsted framework, in place since September 2019.

Headteacher Helena Boast said: "We have worked hard as a team to ensure our curriculum is ambitious and that students are developed as rounded individuals, as well as achieving excellent exam results.

"Staff are dedicated to supporting our students in achieving their best and the school community was pleased to have this recognised in the inspection."

Schools across The Sigma Trust used their skills and materials to produce desperately needed personal protection equipment to frontline workers during the Coronavirus outbreak...

Vital PPE provided to frontline workers by school

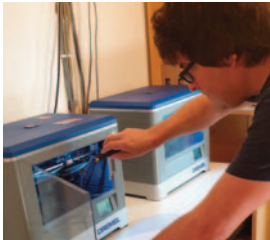


A design technology team supported key workers by producing and donating personal protective equipment (PPE). Technicians at Clacton County High School

produced laser cut face visors for nurses and carers, using equipment stocked for lessons and donations from Clacton Rotary Jubilee, staff and their families.

The team produced more than 500 visors for The Oaks Hospital, St Helena Hospice, care homes and Clacton Hospital.

Home production line set up for PPE



A plea for urgent supplies of personal protection equipment (PPE) saw a family set up their own production line.

William James, senior science technician at St

Helena School, was shielding at home when he was approached and asked to help the NHS.

Collecting the 3D printers from school, Mr James and his wife set up a production line in their hallway, producing 2,000 pieces of PPE over five weeks.

They received £1,500 in donations online, as well as £220 from Clacton Rotary Club to buy materials.

The face visors were distributed to care homes, schools, nurses, the police and other key workers.

Leftover funds were distributed between Colchester Foodbank, GO4 Cafe and FaNs Network for their work supporting the community during lockdown.

Not so secret sewing club

Teachers made hundreds of face coverings as part of an initiative to keep people safe.

During lockdown, staff at The Stanway School gave up their time to make scrub bags and ear savers for key workers.



The Not So Secret Sewing Society received donations of materials to make the personal protection equipment (PPE), with more than 250 scrub bags, 180 ear savers and 400 face coverings produced in six weeks.

The group, who also took part in the Community Mask Trees where PPE is hung on a tree to be safely collected by those who need it, raised more than £600 which was donated to the Trussell Trust and Next Chapter to support them during the crisis.

Putting school PPE to good use

The corridors may have been largely empty, but a distant hum, buzz and whir of a laser cutter could be heard in one school.

Debra Baker, design technology teacher at Thomas Lord Audley School, spent lockdown in school making personal protection equipment for the NHS. She made 100 face visors and 100 ear protectors to help those working on the frontline during the crisis.



The school also donated goggles, safety glasses and gloves usually used by students during experiments to the NHS via Essex County Council.

The catering team handed over its gloves – not needed with the majority of students staying at home – to staff working in local care homes.

Building opportunities to train as one

Teachers and support staff from across the 12 schools came together to take part in workshops and hear lectures from leading national speakers.

February saw another trust-wide INSET day promote pedagogy and practice across the organisation.

Sessions came from Craig Barton, author of the best-selling *How I Wish I'd Taught Maths*; and Mark Roberts, who has written extensively on rethinking masculinity in schools, on further

raising boys' engagement and achievement.

Jeff Brindle, The Sigma Trust CEO, said: "The INSET day is fundamental in reinforcing the values of the Trust by sharing best practice among our family of schools and creating a centre of educational excellence.

"Staff, at whatever stage of their career, value taking part in high quality professional development, as well as networking with like-minded colleagues."

Update on...our trainees

Trainee teachers at NETT have been supporting at school through Covid-19 and continuing their training through online learning and tasks.

Trainees are on target to complete their course within the expected timeframes and the majority are moving on to NOT posts in schools, which may look quite different in September.

Dr Sarah Alix, programme director, said: "I am sure they will be well supported by experienced staff and they are looking forward to the challenges ahead.

"NETT are working towards a blended learning approach ready for September and welcoming the new cohort of trainees for the pre-course induction morning in July.

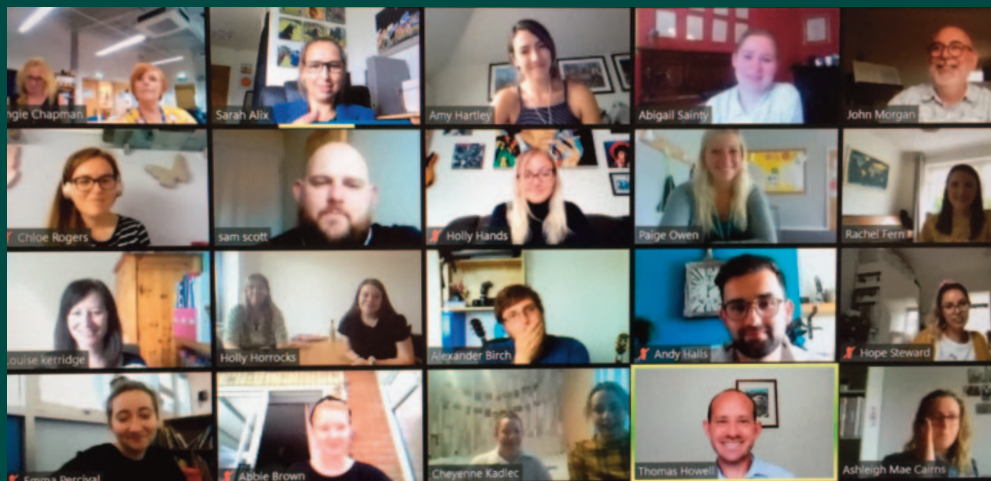
"Schools are supporting trainees being in schools

and, at NETT, we understand that flexibility will be needed in what the course will look like within schools over the coming months.

"We would like to thank schools for their continued support to develop trainee teachers."

Dr Alix has had a book published to support Foster Carers in understanding Education for Looked After Children.

She has also had an article published by Schools Week and NETT has had a review published in the Parliamentary Review. Read here... <https://schoolsweek.co.uk/looked-after-children-need-better-trained-teachers/> and <https://www.theparliamentaryreview.co.uk/organisations/north-essex-teacher-training>



Have you thought about a career in teaching at a primary, secondary school or special school?

We are now recruiting for **September 2020**

Alternatively, consider the Internship
programme to gain experience of working
in a school before training.

For further information on a career in teaching or the
Internship programme contact:

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