



ISSUE 1 SIGMA NEWS

FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS AND CARERS OF THE SIGMA TRUST

Greater than the sum of its parts



INSIDE THIS ISSUE!

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WELCOME...

I would like to offer a warm welcome to all parents and carers to our very first edition of Sigma News. The magazine has been produced to give you an insight into many of the fantastic events and achievements which have been taking place within the schools that make up the Sigma Trust.

Sigma was established in September 2016 to bring together a group of six schools which have a strong history of working collaboratively; Clacton County High School, Monkwick Infant and Nursery School, Monkwick Junior School, St Helena School, The Stanway School and The Thomas Lord Audley School.

Later this term, we will be welcoming Harwich and Dovercourt High School (HDHS) to our family of schools. HDHS has a long association of partnership working with all of the secondary schools within Sigma. It was a founding member of the North East Essex Education Partnership (NEEEP) and fully supported the move to create a multi-academy trust. This now brings our total number of schools up to seven. With nearly 6,000 students and more than 700 staff, we are the largest multi-academy trust solely serving Essex schools.

The Sigma Trust aims to be Greater Than The Sum Of Its Parts. We believe we are stronger and more successful working together than we would be as separate institutions.

The mission for each academy within the Sigma Trust is to ensure no child is left behind. Education should foster in its learners a curiosity to discover who they are and what they are capable of, together with developing the resilience for them to test the boundaries of their abilities and to build the skills necessary to face the future with confidence.

Jeff Brindle, CEO, The Sigma Trust



We are the Sigma family...



St Helena School



Thomas Lord Audley School



AHOY THERE!



Imaginative youngsters are jumping on board the latest outdoor play equipment at Monkwick Junior School.

A wooden pirate ship has been installed to encourage imaginative play and to give pupils somewhere to let off steam and have fun.

The addition is the latest in a series of projects to make the best use of the outdoor space at the school, where teachers are able to give exciting lessons and appeal to those who may struggle in the traditional classroom or need to improve their social skills.

The ship, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, sits alongside the school's trim trail of fitness apparatus, outdoor amphitheatre, Millennium Garden and tyre agility course.

Headteacher Mark Walter said: "Our children have a lot to amuse themselves with during break and lunchtimes now. The pirate ship is just another excellent piece of stimulation for the children to enjoy."

Work is due to start in the summer on a building project to expand Monkwick Junior School

The school has moved to a three-form entry and so needs to add extra teaching space and meeting areas.

With pupil numbers growing in the area, the school is looking to add two new classrooms in a two-storey extension, as well as remodelling the existing site to create further teaching areas. The new building will also house a Special Educational Needs area, a studio and space for food, science and design and technology lessons.

A contractor has been selected this month and work is scheduled to begin in July with a view to opening the new building for September 2018.

Headteacher Mark Walter said: "There is a lack of school places in Colchester and we are seeing a growing number of children coming through to us. With so many children also coming to us from outside of the area, we need to expand to cater for that."

Dated buildings at Thomas Lord Audley School are being improved

Parts of the school date back to the 1950s and 1960s and have become worn and no longer fit for purpose.

A total of £584,000 of Condition Improvement Fund from the Education Funding Agency was awarded to update the fire alarm system and windows.

Dave Boggis, operations manager, said: "The fire alarm project has now been completed. We have a modern system which has improved safety in the school. Students and staff are getting used to the digital beeping sounds at lesson changeovers which replaced the old bells.

"Work on the windows and window walling has recently begun. The end outcome will be a much improved environment with great benefits for all at the school."

Oversubscribed Stanway School is growing to cope with demand

A total of £6.9m of funding has been allocated under the basic need criteria for the school's expansion project, taking it to a ten form entry with more than 1,400 students by 2021.

A new science and technology wing is already being constructed with a new art, music and PE block to follow. The project will also see the demolition of Gainsborough, a 50-year-old block and the only remaining part of the original school.

Julian Lamb, governor, said: "The school will have state-of-the-art buildings providing a first-class learning environment.

"The Sigma Trust's estate of schools will be greatly improved and this places us at the forefront of educational provision in the area."

A development of the IT provision is being carried out at Monkwick Infant and Junior Schools

Both schools are networked with Thomas Lord Audley School and use their support services.

The Sigma Trust has tasked one of the IT team to work across the two schools to support them and set up online interventions such as Lexia.

Claire Holmes, infant school headteacher, said: "Since expanding, we have had a complete overhaul of our IT provision. Now, it is about working together and having better control of services."

The infant school invested in LearnPad classroom tablets in September to assist with learning.

Wifi was installed at the infant school along with its new building last year by the local authority.

A business partnership with a rail firm is boosting careers guidance at Thomas Lord Audley School (TLA)

In 2014, the school teamed up with Greater Anglia enabling the careers programme for Year 10 and 11 to be developed.

The company helps the school with its annual PSHE careers day, giving advice on building a good CV, as well as giving tips on interview skills during mock interviews.

Greater Anglia also held an event for Year 9 to consider careers in the rail industry. Sue Green, TLA careers adviser, said: "Being connected with Greater Anglia has provided a very big careers resource to the school as we have been able to work closely with a large employer and they regularly help to deliver careers-based activities."

The school regularly invites employers, college and university representatives to give assemblies to all year groups to inspire their future paths, as well as organising trips to Colchester's colleges.



Year 10 also take part in the St Helena Hospice £10 Challenge, turning their small investment into a total of £555.82 by planning and hosting events.

Monkwick Infant School now welcomes two-year-olds into class

Recent expansion of the school building included a room specifically for the younger children to provide a smooth transition into reception.



In addition to funding for three and four-year-olds, the Government now enables some two-year-olds to have 15 hours of free early education a week until the term after their third birthday.

Claire Holmes, headteacher, said: "We are working every day with our youngest children to develop speech and language, creative, physical and emotional skills. This expansion enables us to provide intervention at the earliest opportunity to those who need it."

Any eligible children can access funding from the term after they turn two once the family has received approval of their application. Families entitled to the places are those who also meet the free school meals criteria.

Four new members of staff have joined the school to support this provision.

Junior pupils went on a scavenger hunt to find their passion for reading

Pupils at Monkwick Junior School took part in the Scavenger Reading Challenge to complete various tasks which saw them reading in original spots and with different people.

The different writing genres were displayed on a map for pupils to find, read and complete, developing a love of reading at home. Launched at the school's breakfast club, the Scavenger Hunt got pupils to follow a map to complete the tasks, which included reading a story in bed, reading to someone older and younger, reading a children's classic, reading a newspaper article, reading a non-fiction book, discussing a book with someone at home and reading in their favourite place.

Headteacher Mark Walter said: "I was keen for our PTA, Monkwick United, to launch an academic project with the pupils. They produced the maps to get the excitement going and it took off from there. This was all about encouraging our children to read anything and everything, wherever and whenever just to spark that passion for reading."

Education is being delivered in an Eastern African community thanks to Clacton County High School

Elizabeth Bailey, director of English, spent two and a half weeks in the Monkey Bay area working with the Malawi Volunteer Organisation.

She taught in orphanages, visited schools, gave healthcare talks and assisted in wound clinics.



As a result of fundraising events back in Clacton, Miss Bailey was able to take resources to a secondary school as well as money to fund 92 school desks and chairs, 18 students to attend school for a year, the training of a primary school teacher and food for orphans.

She said: "It has made me rethink my attitude towards the availability of food and resources and I am determined to continue to help the community I was a part of."

Students and staff in Clacton supported the cause by collecting items for the Samaritans Purse Christmas Appeal.



Aspirations are being raised through Learning and Homework Profiles

Following the work to develop the programmes by St Helena School, Thomas Lord Audley School adopted the concept.

The aim was to raise the aspirations of students and to reward effort, resilience and a growth mindset.

Students and teachers work within a clear framework which outlines the expectations of the students, working towards developing their growth mindset. Homework is now set and assessed using the homework profiles, allowing students to challenge themselves away from the classroom.

Ian Muir, senior school improvement leader, said: "This encourages students to go above and beyond in their efforts and there is a noticeable improvement in the effort being applied to homework. The framework has also had an impact on lesson planning and the setting of

homework; encouraging teachers to include elements of challenge at all stages of the lesson, including the homework.

"Moving forward, we will now look to further support the learning profile of students, encouraging students to apply a growth mindset to their lessons, embrace challenges and push them-selves to achieve aspirational goals."

Students are rewarded for their efforts, with trips and Growth Mindset Stars which are issued to those applying the principles of growth mindset most effectively.

The use of showmyhomework.co.uk enables the school and parents to work together to set and monitor homework. It also encourages students to take greater responsibility for managing and completing homework, to the standard required.

GROWTH MINDSET

Students at The Stanway School are being encouraged to have a growth mindset.

Building on research by Dr Carol Dweck, the school is committed to creating a learning environment where students feel challenged and supported to adopt a "yes, I can" attitude. The growth mindset culture is directing students away from comments such as "I can't do maths", "I don't want to make any mistakes" and "why bother, this is too hard" and towards "I can't do this...yet" and "mistakes help me to learn".

Key characteristics being fostered are perseverance, collaboration, independence, risk taking, engagement and reflection. Staff and parents have been given training on the subject.

Nick Mussett, assistant headteacher, said: "There has been a noticeable shift in how some of the students view learning. They are prepared to take more risks and are prepared to make mistakes as, ultimately, they know they will have a deeper understanding of a topic or idea. The students have been extremely positive about it and staff have seen the significant value and impact of it."

Students demonstrating the growth mindset characteristics consistently earn themselves a reward trip.

The worldwide web is helping students to become national language stars



Year 9, 10 and 11 students at St Helena School are using thislanguage.com to improve their language skills.

The site works on a points basis, depending on how successful each student is and how often they use the site.

In the first term of using the programme, a Year 9 class topped the rankings nationally and will feature on the provider's website. Year 10 student Gaby Morris also beat entries from 6,000 students around the country – mainly from independent schools – to win the Nutty Tilez French vocab competition.

Tom Starmer, head of modern foreign languages, said: "The site focuses primarily on listening to authentic French language, but also has an element of vocab acquisition and grammar which are both excellent. The idea of using this site is to improve our students' achievement in the listening element of the GCSE exams."

Vocab star Gaby said: "I really enjoy the listening exercises because they are helpful and challenging. Before the competition, I practised every level to learn the vocabulary. If there was a particular word I found difficult to remember, I wrote it on a piece of paper and revised it."

A personalised approach to learning is helping to boost the standards of reading at Monkwick Junior School

Thanks to funding by the Sigma Trust, the school has signed up to online programme Lexia and set about changing the culture of reading among its young people.

Year 5 and 6 have already seen the benefits to the computer programme, with Year 4 and Year 3 next to make a start.

Pupils take on a number of exercises, which they can also access from home, to improve their reading fluency and grammar.

Mark Walter, headteacher, said: "One of the activities is reading a certain number of words in a minute. By reading quicker and more accurately, they will be more able to get through test questions in future and will not be phased by a page of text.

"This has changed the way we teach."

Pupils devote three 20-minute sessions to Lexia each week.

More teachers are being trained through Thomas Lord Audley School

The school is working with education charity Teach First, as well as Colchester Teacher Training Consortium, with the aim of creating outstanding teachers.

Three members of staff are on the two-year programme, receiving professional support towards earning their PGCE and QTS qualifications.

Kevin Rowland, assistant headteacher, said: "The participants receive a personalised program to help enhance and develop their own professional objectives. They are very driven and keen

to learn within the school environment. "Our trainees provide an opportunity for new teaching ideas and best practice to be shared."

One trainee said: "My favourite thing about this job is seeing the students get excited about a lesson I have planned, or about how much they have achieved. I don't think a day has gone by where one of my students hasn't made me smile and I think that's a wonderful thing to find in any job."

The Sigma Trust is striving to provide different routes into teaching. The Trust is working with teacher training provider North Essex Teacher Training (NETT) and Coast2Coast Teaching School Alliance.

From September 2017, NETT will be providing Level 7 PGCE courses for both primary and secondary trainees ready to start their initial teacher training (ITT). Applications are now open to begin training this year.

The Stepping Stones course provides paid employment in a Sigma school to gain experience in the classroom before deciding whether a career in teaching is for them and embarking on ITT.

The work is combined with bespoke training and support with skills tests to ensure ITT applications are successful.

Contact Jane Adamson or Darren Mackman for further details.

Girls got to grips with science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM)

The Year 8 and 9 students from St Helena School attended Pretty Curious, designed to encourage girls and young women into the STEM field.

The event, held inside an inflatable igloo in Trinity Park in Ipswich, saw students work in teams to take on a range of activities.

Heather McCollin, science teacher, said: "The girls got involved with finding out about smart technology, building nuclear reactors using the latest virtual reality headsets and creating their own smart gadgets using littleBits electronics equipment and some crazy craft materials.

"Working in teams, the girls demonstrated excellent teamwork, ingenuity and resilience. They were enthusiastic, fabulous scientists."



History leapt off the page for infants

Year 2 pupils at Monkwick Infant School studied the topic of castles and dragons and took part in a Life in a Castle Day to bring their studies to life.

A team from History Off The Page spent a day at the school, giving pupils the opportunity to experience living in a fairytale castle.

They also used authentic tools and materials to learn skills in a variety of workshops ahead of Sleeping Beauty and Prince Charming's wedding and banquet.

Everyday life is helping students to get to grips with numeracy

A new approach has been adopted at Thomas Lord Audley School to give students a better understanding of how numbers feature in real life.

Numeracy Across the Curriculum opens students' eyes to where numeracy helps with managing time and money, planning journeys and events, cooking, handling data and the importance of presenting and analysing it.

Each fortnight, students complete a tutor-time task which comes with a ticksheet for their planner to help them to develop new skills throughout lessons.

Cecely Manners, assistant headteacher, said: "This is about developing strategy to develop numeracy through tutor-time activities and within lessons across the curriculum so students can see the importance and wide use of maths skills across all aspects of education and life.

"Our vision for numeracy is to have the confidence and competence to use numbers and think mathematically in everyday life, not purely the skills of computation."

PE teacher Laura Townsend was shortlisted as Outstanding New Teacher of the Year in the national Pearson Teaching Awards 2016

The teacher from Clacton County High School was among just three in the country to be in the running for the accolade.

Miss Townsend attended the glittering awards ceremony at The Guildhall, London, which recognised and celebrated exceptional teachers and teaching.

Actor and comedian Hugh Dennis presented her with a Silver Teaching Award for her exceptional contribution to the teaching profession.

Principal Neil Gallagher said: "It was great to see teaching in the spotlight for all the right reasons.

"While Laura is deservedly in the spotlight, she is very humble about the recognition and remarked to me that none of this would have been possible without the great team of staff she has around her."



NEWSBITE

Opera singer Richard Moore had boys hitting the high notes

The professional performer, an accomplished bass / baritone, spent time with students at The Stanway School delivering a workshop. He performed a couple of solo pieces by Purcell and Puccini before getting students to sing a three-part harmony.

Richard Harrison, head of music, said: "The boys found the experience really enjoyable and are keen to get involved in future singing projects.

"This one-off workshop was made possible through our exciting new partnership with the Pimlott Foundations, a registered charity doing great things with arts in our area."



NEWSBITE

Little stretchy bugs are learning to take charge of their emotional and physical wellbeing

Pupils at Monkwick Infant School have taken up yoga to help them to manage their own behaviour through breathing and relaxation techniques. Yoga Bugs Impact and Change is a bespoke child development programme which is integrated into the curriculum and suitable for children of all abilities.

Claire Holmes, headteacher, said: "Yoga Bugs supports our children's social and emotional skills and offers them strategies to help calm themselves down when necessary. The more we can prepare our young people in this way, the more they will be able to do it for themselves as they get older. It is part of our focus on teaching lifelong skills."

The programme was introduced at the infant school in September and is funded through Pupil Premium.



State-of-the-art sport facilities have been unveiled at Stanway School

The school received £500,000 of funding as part of the £6.9m allocated for a basic need new-build and expansion for sporting facilities.

The development includes a new 3G pitch, up to FIFA standards, new long jump and triple jump pit plus three cricket nets with a surface meeting full ECB standards.

The school qualified for the new multi-use games area (MUGA) as its field space did not meet Sport England area guidelines, while the MUGA counts as double the size due to its year-round use.

Jon Bland, headteacher, said: “The PE department now has greatly enhanced provision and will be able to play outside in all weather and ground conditions.



“The community and local organisations will also benefit as we will be hiring out the pitch from 5.30pm to 9.30pm each day, at weekends and during the school holidays.”

Rugby squads from St Helena School have had a successful season

The Year 7 team have played 12 matches and remain unbeaten. In the NEESSA final, they played Harwich and the score was a close 5-5.



The Year 8 team came second in the district finals, losing to Tendring. Captain Thomas Ramsey has been playing at Colchester RFC and has been invited to attend a weekly development programme with the Northampton Saints.

Steve Haycock, faculty leader of PE and rugby coach, said: “None of the Year 7 team had played rugby before and they have worked and trained very hard.

“Year 8 have made significant progress from the previous year when they just missed out in making the Colchester final.”



Secondary school PE teachers are now working with infants

Staff from Thomas Lord Audley School (TLA) are giving high quality games and gymnastics lessons to Year 1 and 2 pupils at Monkwick Infant School.

The year-long commitment encourages confidence in rugby, netball, tennis, gymnastics, dance, football, athletics and cricket.

Matthew Julier, lead teacher of PE at TLA, said: “The children are receiving high quality physical education lessons in a large, five badminton court sports hall by three highly trained and enthusiastic PE teachers.”

SIGMA **NEWSBITE**

Team GB sprinter Nethaneel Mitchell-Blake dashed to Clacton to share his tips on Olympic success.

After his Rio 2016 appearance, the star visited Clacton County High School for a day to see his former Ilford Athletics Club teammate and PE teacher Laura Townsend.

Nethaneel spoke with students from all year groups about his Olympic experiences as well as leading practical sessions focusing on sprinting skills, tips and practices. He also held a question and answer session with A-level students and spoke about his training schedule and how he focuses before a race.

The 22-year-old was selected for the Team GB Olympic athletics squad in May, on the back of a 19.95-second performance – putting him as the second fastest Briton of all time over 200m. He made it to the semi-finals in Rio.

Ms Townsend said: “We all had a great day with the Olympic superstar and our students certainly enjoyed the time he spent with us!”

