



SIGMA NEWS

For the Staff and Stakeholders of The Sigma Trust

Greater than the sum of its parts



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- Popular careers event goes online

Welcome...

Dear Colleagues,



I hope as many of you as possible were able to take a well-deserved break over the Christmas period and celebrate the holiday in the best and safest way possible.

The start to the term was not what I envisaged for a new year and many challenges continue to face us all. As CEO, be assured school leaders do not underestimate the toll the previous term has taken upon you and we will continue to support you in every way possible.

Even in these strange times, we have new staff joining us, so I would like to take the time to welcome all new staff to The Sigma Trust and also Simon Essex as he takes up his first headship at The Thomas Lord Audley School.

This term, we are facing a new set of challenges with the introduction of the testing of all staff, as well as the scaling up of onsite testing for secondary students when they return to school.

We are still awaiting greater clarity in the approach towards awarding students in Year 11 and 13 teacher assessed grades and what role the exam boards will play in this. We will approach these challenges

in a united way as a Trust.

We had planned for a Trust inset day on February 22 – sadly, due to restrictions, we have had to change our plans and look at doing things differently. Your headteacher will share these plans with you shortly.

Please take a moment to read through this edition of Sigma News, acknowledge all the exceptional work that took place last term and reflect on the continuing remarkable tasks you do every day in supporting and educating children and giving them the best chance of a positive future.

Take a moment out of each day to celebrate the difference you are making, the extra thought you are giving in your lesson preparation to deliver high quality remote learning, every phone call made or taken from a family in need, and every meal voucher, food parcel or home learning pack that is making a difference to ensure that no child is left behind.

Although this year has already had its challenges and will no doubt have more, we will be welcoming children and young people back fully at some point. As a Trust and family of schools, the work carried out has been phenomenal and it is remarkable how the strength gained by working together has created the resilience to cope with the current and future challenges.

Thank you for everything you continue to do, to support our young people, families and the community.

Keep strong and keep safe.

*Lyn Wright, CEO,
The Sigma Trust*

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Doors open to new sixth form provision



Sixth formers are benefitting from the launch of Sigma Sixth.

Both Tendring and Colchester campuses welcomed their first cohorts of sixth form

students in September. In Tendring, the sixth form has evolved from the provision set up by Clacton County High School. In September, it relocated to a new, extensively refurbished site with the same staff and core beliefs.

Sarah McKarry, Head of College, said: "Sigma Sixth Tendring provides an outstanding learning environment and enrichment facilities, including specialist art and design studios, dance studio, theatre performance space, mac suite and recording studio, four-court sports hall and astro turf pitches, well-equipped technology workshops, excellent ICT provision, modern social spaces and on-site café.



"Sigma Sixth Tendring provides a genuine college experience for the young people in Tendring. This new sixth

form college will enthuse, inspire, challenge and prepare students for the next stage of their life."

In Colchester, the provision builds on the traditions of the former Philip Morant College. Sigma Sixth Colchester includes a Sports Academy, based at The Northern Gateway Sports Park.

Scott Holder, Executive Headteacher, said: "This is an exciting time for everyone at Sigma Sixth Colchester.

"With increased numbers this year, we are confident our sixth form will continue to expand and remain a centre of educational excellence for the young people in our area.

"The college has a relaxed yet purposeful atmosphere. It is a great place to learn, establish friendships, and prepare yourself for future success."

Visit:
www.sigmasixth.org.uk



Will remote learning keep a strong foothold after the pandemic?

In March, all schools shifted to home learning and a new way of teaching.

While the move was enforced due to the pandemic, schools have embraced the changes and found positives in the new normal.

Fiona Cook, The Sigma Trust Strategic Lead, said: "When we heard the news that schools were closing and we would be teaching from home for an unknown period of time, many of us were suddenly faced with new ways of working. For some, it was an opportunity to embrace their love of using technology to support learning, while for others, it was a daunting undertaking to navigate through online platforms such as Google Classroom."

Moving into 2021, what will teaching look like?

Mrs Cook said: "These challenging times have brought out exciting possibilities for the future, and many of the new ways of learning we have adopted will undoubtedly become part of our everyday practices for the future.

"It is exciting to see the staying power of remote learning beyond the pandemic as our new way of working becomes embedded practice.

"These changes have the potential to transform how we educate and support our young people now and in the future."

- For help and guidance on blended learning, ask your school's teaching and learning lead for the Trust's Guide to Effective Teaching & Learning or contact a strategic lead.

Bespoke alternative provision for secondary students

The Sigma Trust has been commissioned by the local authority to pilot a Key Stage 3 provision for north east Essex.

GROW Secondary is an additional education provision to support students experiencing social, emotional and / or mental health difficulties while attending mainstream secondary school. Students attend Stanway Youth Centre on a bespoke timetable aimed at aiding their ability to self-regulate to be able to navigate school life. They will also learn –

- to improve self-control and self-regulation
- to strengthen their resilience and decision-making
- an enhanced enthusiasm for learning
- to reduce peer to peer conflict

- to develop positive social skills such as empathy, compassion, patience and generosity

Alison Rudd, Assistant Director of Education for The Sigma Trust, said: "At GROW Secondary, we are dedicated to helping deepen students' understanding of their own mental process, allowing them to understand why they behave in the way they do in order to improve their self-regulation and positive behaviours.

"Crucial to the success for every student is the commitment and communication from parents or carers right from the start."

North east Essex secondary schools can refer a student to GROW for one or two terms, with attendance decided by a half-termly panel.

New headteacher "excited" to lead school

A new headteacher has been appointed to lead The Thomas Lord Audley School from January.

Simon Essex has been appointed to replace Helena Boast who left the post at Christmas.

Ms Boast, who has been at the school since 2008, fought to keep the school open when she joined, helped it to reach a Good Ofsted rating and achieved the status of being the most improved secondary school in Essex in 2016.

She said: "I consider my biggest achievement enabling students to believe in themselves and achieve success. The school is ready for a new headteacher to take it forward on the next stage of its journey and I need another challenge towards the end of my career. I will miss teaching

and working with the students, working with and being supported by the staff, being part of the school community and my daily interactions with students and colleagues."



Mr Essex, who has been deputy headteacher for eight years, said: "I am incredibly excited to lead The Thomas Lord Audley School into the next stages of its journey. I am proud of what we have already achieved and feel strongly that we are well positioned to do even more as we move forward. I am an ambitious individual and have always been driven to ensure students are served as well as they can be by their school. I am passionate about creating the best possible opportunities for our young people. Our staff and students are amazing."

School and parent partnership recognised

Monkwick Infant School has won the Leading Parent Partnership Award, a national standard for effective parent partnership.

The award was secured in response to written evidence provided by the school and views given by video call by staff, parents, pupils and a governor.

The verification report stated: "There is a clear philosophy and culture underlying the work of the school that they are a partnership with parents

and are seeking to work together to the benefit of students and wider families. These are based around the key themes of ensuring open communication, celebrating students' achievements at all levels and sharing key information and developing parents' skills to support their own children."

Headteacher Claire Holmes said: "I am really delighted that the school has been recognised for the importance it places on working in

partnership with parents.

"The school has always stood for community and has put supporting children and their families at the heart of all we do. The whole team works together to improve outcomes for pupils through connecting with parents and carers. I am extremely proud of the work the school does."

The school was assessed via video conferencing to meet Covid-19 guidelines. The award is valid for three years.

Annual careers event relaunched virtually

The Sigma Virtual Careers Convention was launched online during the pandemic.

Each year, schools in Colchester and Tendring come together to meet with representatives from across various industries and local further education colleges to help them to decide on their future pathways.

About 2,000 Year 11 students attend each year as they prepare to apply for their post-16 options.

Organiser Paula Deighton, Careers Lead at The Stanway School, said: "Students can go into the virtual convention and look at different areas, they can get careers guidance, read about different jobs and follow links to organisations

such as the NHS to learn more. We have brought everything together for our students in one place."

Students traditionally get one hour to visit the careers event, while this year the online facility means they can keep returning to look at information – including with their families from home.

A newsletter has been launched to share careers news and virtual opportunities with students who were also given a presentation on how to get the best out of the new-look event.

Students from across The Sigma Trust secondary schools were invited to take part in the virtual event.

Building revamp for school science block

Harwich and Dovercourt High School has had a full refurbishment of its outdated science building.

The revamp included the demolition of a failing section of the block to make way for two state-of-the-art new classrooms and a new landscaped outdoor space.

In addition to the full modernisation and refurbishment of six science labs, the facilities have seen the installation of an upgraded heating system, improved ventilation and all new furniture throughout.

Smart TVs have also been installed, giving a boost to a modernised teaching and learning environment for all staff and students.

Brand-new student toilet facilities were included in the works as part of the



development of an enlarged foyer space with extra exit points to improve circulation.

New double-glazed windows, roof insulation and PIR activated LED lighting have been installed throughout the building as part of the Trust's drive to reduce the school's overall carbon footprint.



Trust launches *How To...* guides for colleagues

A range of *How To...* guides have been designed by the Trust to share theory, research, tips and know-how.

The latest guide focuses on how colleagues can use a visualiser effectively to project a close-up view of a piece of work or demonstration.

Fiona Cook, Strategic Lead for English, said: "While not new, visualisers have rightly been making a comeback into the classroom and research demonstrates both the psychological and pedagogical benefits of visualisers.

"A visualiser focuses a student on the key learning points of the lesson, thereby reducing the cognitive load, and enables teachers to show pupils a wider range of meaningful, manageable and high-quality models. Its flexibility also makes it a great tool to use in our current blended and remote way of learning."

Ask your school's teaching and learning lead or strategic lead for the Trust's **How to use a Visualiser** guide.

Mrs Cook said: "These guides are designed to pack all of the relevant educational theory and

evidenced-based research, as well as practical tips and useful know-how, into a one-page document with further research, reading and video links provided."



Newly appointed strategic lead for MFL



The profile of learning languages is being raised across the Trust with the appointment of a new strategic lead.

Ross Thorpe has taken up the post, having been head of modern foreign languages at

The Stanway School

for four years and taught Spanish and French for a decade.

He said: "I am passionate about teaching and learning and truly believe that with high expectations and appropriate support, students can achieve anything they put their minds to.

"I love the collaborative approach of working within the Trust as I think it is so important for different schools to support each other in achieving the best possible outcomes for students, helping them to become inquisitive and resilient learners.

"Learning a language is often seen as difficult, but it is so worthwhile and it enriches your life in ways you never thought possible! Not only does it help students to develop their memory skills and to master grammatical concepts, but it also provides so much more.

"Students learn about other countries and their unique customs and traditions, increasing their exposure to different cultures and ways of life.

"At the same time, they develop the ability to communicate with native speakers of the language and to access a whole new range of music, film and literature."

Mr Thorpe's new role will see him bring Trust schools' languages departments closer together.

He said: "As a strategic lead, I am responsible for further improving standards within MFL teaching across the Trust, ensuring consistency and planning opportunities for joint working between the heads of departments and MFL teams.

"My overall aims are to ensure that best practice becomes shared practice, to secure good outcomes for all students and to raise the profile of language learning in Trust schools."

Evolving role of the assistant director of education



Alison Rudd became The Sigma Trust's Assistant Director of Education in September 2019, having previously held posts as year leader, KS3 director, assistant head and deputy headteacher at Clacton County High School. The new role focuses on student support, looking at ensuring students remain in education, taking whatever pathway necessary. It also involves –

- holding meetings and reviews to ensure managed moves take a consistent approach across the Trust
- carrying out reviews and acting as an adviser to designated safeguarding leads on a case-by-case basis
- working closely with Attendance Solutions

Essex and the schools to ensure all students are kept at the centre of all decisions and systems

- working with colleagues in social care, health and mental health to access new interventions and provisions available to students

A priority for this year is to ensure the pilot of the first secondary GROW provision – supporting KS3 students experiencing SEMH barriers – runs efficiently so it can be rolled out to other areas of the county.

Miss Rudd said: "My role is ever changing, which echoes pastoral support across the schools on a daily basis; you never quite know what you're going to be faced with. I believe the role will continue to change and adapt to the demands and needs of the school, staff and students."

School trip organiser shortlisted for national award

A member of school support staff has made it through to the final four in a national award for her work organising trips for students.

SLT Support Assistant Maree Green was nominated for the School Travel Organiser Award when she was business support assistant and school trips co-ordinator at Harwich and Dovercourt High School.

David Cook, director of humanities faculty, nominated Maree and said: "Maree has been incredibly supportive of all school visits and goes above and beyond to help staff organise these visits. Her organisation of a London trip – with 200 students going to 16 venues - was amazing. Without her help and dedication putting children

first, many of these visits wouldn't happen."

Mrs Green said: "I thoroughly enjoyed organising the 2019 Year 7 trip to London and still have the 200 thank-you letters from the students.

"If I am successful in winning, it would be lovely to arrange a trip for our present Year 7 students who unfortunately haven't been able to experience a trip due to the current circumstances."

Mrs Green has made it to the final four of the national competition. A ceremony is due to be held in spring 2021 when the winners will be announced.



Update on...our trainees

Despite the challenges of Covid-19, all NETT (North Essex Teacher Training) trainees have been placed in schools and are gaining teaching experience. Their work is being observed and assessed, with training being delivered remotely online.

Dr Sarah Alix, Programme Director, "We have seen a 35 per cent increase in trainees this year and we expect this trend to continue. I believe people who have reviewed their career options during the pandemic are now seeking a new challenge. Teaching remains a highly rewarding career at a time of great uncertainty and

bursaries are still available for trainee teachers in some subjects. With more than 25 years' experience, NETT is one of the most established teacher training providers in the country. The NETT team pride themselves on providing personalised support with well-qualified, friendly and supportive staff, both at their centre in Clacton and throughout their partnership schools."

Find out about NETT training opportunities at nett.org.uk, on Facebook at NETT – North Essex Teacher Training or by calling 01255 431949.

Register for a place on the new online information events at teach@nett.org.uk or 01255 431949.



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