

2016 / 2017

SECONDARY EDUCATION

The Parliamentary Review

A YEAR IN PERSPECTIVE

■ FOREWORDS

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP

Lucy Powell MP

■ MIDLANDS & EAST OF ENGLAND REPRESENTATIVES

The Market Bosworth School

Witchford Village College

Buxton Community School

Debenham High School

Granville Sports College

Manor High School

New Mills School

Newbridge High School

Northampton School for Girls

Sir Jonathan North Community College

St John Fisher Catholic High School

Creative Education Trust

Wolverhampton Girls' High School

■ FEATURES

Review of the Year

Review of Parliament



The Rt Hon Theresa May MP

Prime Minister

This year's *Parliamentary Review* follows a significant year in British politics. It was a year in which our economy continued to grow, as the Government followed its balanced plan to keep the public finances under control while investing to build a stronger economy. It was a year in which we began to deliver on the result of the EU referendum by triggering Article 50 and publishing the Repeal Bill, which will allow for a smooth and orderly transition as the UK leaves the EU, maximising certainty for individuals and businesses.

And, of course, it was a year in which the General Election showed that parts of our country remain divided and laid a fresh challenge to all of us involved in politics to resolve our differences, deal with injustices and take, not shirk, the big decisions.

That is why our programme for government for the coming year is about recognising and grasping the opportunities that lie ahead for the United Kingdom as we leave the EU. The referendum vote last year was not just a vote to leave the EU – it was a profound and justified expression that our country often does not work the way it should for millions of ordinary working families. So we need to deliver a Brexit deal that works for all parts of the UK, while continuing to build a stronger, fairer country by strengthening our economy, tackling injustice and promoting opportunity and aspiration.

In the year ahead we will continue to bring down the deficit so that young people do not spend most of their working lives paying for our failure to live within our means. We will take action to build a stronger economy so that we can improve people's living standards and fund the public services on which we all depend. We will continue with our modern Industrial Strategy,

deliver the next phase of high-speed rail, improve our energy infrastructure and support the development of automated vehicles and satellite technology, building a modern economy which creates the high-skill jobs of the future.

At the same time, work needs to be done to build a fairer society – where people can go as far as their talents will take them and no one is held back because of their background. So we will continue to work to ensure every child has the opportunity to attend a good school. We will continue to invest in the NHS and reform mental health legislation, making this a priority. And we will work to address the challenges of social care for our ageing population, bringing forward proposals for consultation to build widespread support.

So this is a Government determined to deliver the best Brexit deal, intent on building a stronger economy and a fairer society, committed to keeping our country safe, enhancing our standing in the wider world, and bringing our United Kingdom closer together. We will continue to put ourselves at the service of millions of ordinary working people for whom we will work every day in the national interest.

“We will continue to work to ensure every child has the opportunity to attend a good school”

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP

Minister of State for School Standards
and Minister for Equalities



When we took office in 2010, too many children were leaving primary school struggling with the basics of reading and arithmetic, the national curriculum was failing to ensure pupils left school with the knowledge needed to be successful and artificial grade inflation had destroyed public confidence in national examinations. Reform was badly needed.

The reforms have had a dramatic effect on England's schools. Teachers and headteachers were given increased powers to improve their schools; rigour was re-introduced into the curriculum and examination system; and standards were raised for pupils of all ages.

Already, the fruits of our reforms are showing:

- » This year, 147,000 more six-year-olds are on track to become fluent readers than in 2012 thanks to systematic synthetic phonics and the phonics screening check
- » The GCSE attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers has shrunk by 7% since 2011, and
- » There are almost 1.8 million more Good or Outstanding school places.

But there is much more to do.

Outstanding free schools, such as Michaela Community School, Bedford Free School and the West London Free School, are providing a high-quality, knowledge-rich education for their pupils, but over one million pupils still attend schools that are not yet rated as Good or Outstanding. Whilst the quality of schools has improved, Ofsted has highlighted that provision in

Key Stage 3 remains weak in too many schools. And despite doubling the proportion of pupils taking the EBacc combination of academic GCSEs from one-fifth to two-fifths between 2010 and 2016, too few pupils are being given the opportunity to study English, maths, the sciences, a humanity and a language to 16.

Government must now provide support and a stable accountability framework to allow teachers and headteachers to deliver even greater results for all pupils, whatever their background and wherever they live in the country.

We must share the evidence from the best free schools and academies, so that all pupils can benefit from the effective curriculum and behaviour policies in these schools. We must continue to support teachers and headteachers in achieving the best for their pupils, as our reforms bed in. And we must maintain high expectations for all pupils, of all backgrounds, whatever their circumstances, because it is only when we do this that all pupils have the opportunity to succeed.

“We must continue to support teachers and headteachers in achieving the best for their pupils”



Lucy Powell MP

Education Select Committee (Lab.)

Education has rarely been out of the news in the last year with strong campaigning on school funding by teachers and parents having a big impact on the General Election result.

A hung Parliament means that the Prime Minister's plans for more grammar schools have been dropped. Ministers have found additional funding for the National Funding Formula although it is still not enough and does nothing to help with cost pressures now. Whilst government machinery is fixated on Brexit, school leaders may have some respite from the initiative-itis of recent years.

Schools across the country have lots of which to be proud, and the work you are doing is making a real difference to the lives and prospects of children. Thank you. I know from talking to headteachers in Manchester the real pressures you face to achieve good results. School budgets are falling; teacher recruitment and retention is a challenge; and changes to SAT and GCSE assessment are yet to bed in.

There is excellent practice across the country, with governors and schools leaders innovating and providing a rich learning experience for children. Yet there are also pockets of persistent disadvantage where the gap between rich and poor pupils is widening not narrowing. Even in high-performing schools, the gap can be stark between Pupil Premium children and their peers.

Boosting attainment for all, whilst narrowing the gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers, should be the major focus of government through the school years. Indeed, I would argue that tackling social mobility across all life stages should be the focus of government social policy.

The gap between poorer children and their peers starts pre-school, yet very little is being done to ensure all children are ready for school.

Ministers must redouble efforts to ensure there are enough good teachers in our schools. That means looking at pay. We won't have world-class schools without recruiting and retaining world-class teachers.

Fair funding will dominate the next few years and it's unjustifiable that schools in Bradford or Knowsley get far less per pupil than schools with similar intakes in Tower Hamlets. However, some already high-performing areas will see increases. New funding needs to address need, to narrow the gap and boost attainment where there are problems, not just allocate funding on an arbitrary formula.

We have debated education many times in Parliament this year, focusing Ministers' minds on the particular challenges schools face. I know that colleagues in Parliament greatly welcome invitations and visits to schools so that MPs can see firsthand the work you are doing.

I hope we continue to see education in the news, so that school leaders, and parliamentarians, can continue to work together to tackle the big issues affecting education.

“Boosting attainment for all should be the major focus of government through the school years”

Return of the Two Party System

The BBC's Andrew Neil gives his take on the state of Parliament following the June 2017 general election.

It was a year in which politicians learned not only of the power of a referendum to overrule the will of Parliament – but of its power to change the party system in which they operate. Nobody saw this coming. But, in retrospect, perhaps we should have, since we had the fallout from the Scottish referendum to guide us.

In the autumn of 2014 the Scots voted 55%-45% to remain part of the United Kingdom. That was supposed to settle the matter of Scottish independence for a generation, until some Scottish Nationalists began regarding a generation as no more than a couple of years. But in post-referendum elections to Holyrood and Westminster, it also recast the Scottish party system.

Remember, Scotland had been one of the first parts of the UK to throw off the British two-party system and replace it with a multi-party choice of SNP, Labour, Tory, Green, Lib Dem and even UKIP. But as the constitutional issue took centre-stage – and remained there even after the referendum – Scottish voters coalesced round a binary choice: for or against independence.

Thus was a new two-party system born of a centre-left Nationalist party (the SNP) and a centre-right Unionist party (the Scottish Tories). The other parties have not been completely obliterated, especially in Holyrood with its peculiar voting system. But by the general election of 2017 Scotland had become a battle between a dominant

Nationalist party and a resurgent Tory party representing the Union. Two-party politics was back north of the border.

So we should have been prepared for something similar when Britain voted 52% to 48% to leave the European Union in the June 2016 referendum. At the time, we remarked on the power of referenda to overrule both the Commons (where MPs were 65% pro-EU) and the Lords (probably 80% pro-EU). What we did not see was how the Brexit referendum would reconfigure English politics just as the Scottish referendum had redrawn Scottish politics.

So we were taken by surprise for a second time. In this year's general election – perhaps the single biggest act of self-harm a sitting government has ever inflicted on itself – almost 85% in England voted either Conservative or Labour. The English had not voted in such numbers for both major parties since 1970, when the post-war two-party system began to wane – and declined in subsequent elections to a point where barely 65% voted Tory or Labour, encouraging some commentators to think the decline terminal.

The referendum, however, reversed the decline. The Brexit vote ended the schism on the Eurosceptic Right as UKIP voters returned to the Tory fold; and those on the Left of the Greens and the Lib Dems flocked to Jeremy Corbyn's more 'Red Flag' Labour offering. So, as in Scotland previously, two-party politics was back with a vengeance in England too.

But without one crucial element. Our historic two-party system regularly produced one-party government for the life of a Parliament. But our new two-party system has produced a hung Parliament with no party having an overall majority. This knife-edge parliamentary arithmetic means the smaller parties may be down – but they are not out.

The Conservatives need an alliance with one small party (Ulster's DUP) to be sure of a majority. Even then, with the Tories and Labour divided over Brexit, no majority on any issue will be certain and on many votes the smaller parties will be pivotal in determining many outcomes.

So politicians return from their summer recess to a great parliamentary paradox: the two-party system has resurrected itself but rather than bringing with it the stability and certainty of the two-party politics of old, almost every major vote in the months ahead will be uncertain and unpredictable – and politics will be peculiarly unstable. Power will rest in Parliament. Government will be able to take nothing for granted. No vote will be in the bag until all the votes are counted. Westminster will have a new lease of life – perhaps even a spring in its step. Our democracy might be all the better for it.



Neil believes two referendums have redrawn the map of British politics.

Review of the Year

A year of political upheavals... again



The Queen's speech, following the June election, made no mention of any education proposals from the government

This was another year of political upheavals. It meant that many of the education policies and proposals set out by ministers and fiercely debated were in the end swept away without ever getting beyond the drawing board.

It was a curious case of big plans, false starts and then emergency stops. At the beginning of the year, education was in the headlines with radical and controversial plans over the return of grammar schools. The personal commitment of the Prime Minister Theresa May to improving social mobility meant a focus on reforming the education system and supporting the so-called 'ordinary working families'.

But when the election result left neither party with a majority, the manifesto promises on education were shelved. In the Queen's Speech that followed the election, there was not a single bill for education, which must be the first time for many decades that an incoming government had nothing in its legislative programme for education.

The Government's plans were not thrown away exactly, but they had been put into the political equivalent of long-term cold storage.

It wasn't an outcome that many could have predicted.

At the beginning of the school year, in September 2016, the Government set out its plans for re-shaping England's school system. This consultative Green Paper, 'Schools That Work for Everyone', prepared the way for the return of selection by ability, proposing a new generation of grammar schools. The ban on expanding selective education, introduced in 1998, would be abolished.

The ambition was to create a new type of grammar school, intended to become ladders of opportunity to help bright youngsters from poorer homes. They would support families who could not afford to buy their way into the catchment areas of the most successful schools. They would help those hard-working families under-served by a state education system which seemed to work in favour of the metropolitan middle classes.

There was much hostility to the plans – from teachers' unions, opposition parties and education researchers, who contended that academic selection tended to become a form of social selection.

The claims and counter-claims smouldered through the winter and the spring – with the Education Secretary, Justine Greening, arguing that these would be a new type of grammar school and would not be a return to the past. Campaigners against grammars lobbied hard, arguing that the Government should have other

priorities for schools, such as tackling funding problems.

But after all the sound and fury, the General Election was called, interrupting the plans for grammars before they had moved beyond the stage of a consultation. The Conservative manifesto set out the next stepping stones, promising to end the ban on new grammar schools and to review an admissions system based on 'selection by house price'.

The Conservative manifesto had a raft of other education policies. Universities wanting to charge maximum tuition fees would have to play a role in sponsoring academies or helping free schools. Teachers would not have to pay back tuition fees while they remained in teaching. There would be measures to encourage more free schools to be set up by faith groups. Free lunches for all infants were to be stopped and the money diverted back to basic school budgets.

But the election result in June meant a sudden end to all these policies.

It was a curious vacuum. Because, even though these plans were not going ahead, the Conservative Government was still in power. Education Secretary Justine Greening remained in place but there would be no education legislation.

There was quiet confirmation that bringing back grammars was officially dead. A written answer from Justine Greening conceded that the 'ban on opening new grammar schools will remain in place'. The plan to scrap free meals for all infants was not going to happen. But it remained uncertain as to whether other manifesto ideas would still be pursued or else be quietly rolled into the long grass.

If this electoral reversal stopped the Conservatives from implementing their plans, the result also gave no mandate to the opposition. Labour failed to win a majority and the education promises



Education Secretary Justine Greening had a difficult task in defending the government's proposal for grammar schools

of Jeremy Corbyn and Shadow Education Secretary Angela Rayner could not be put into practice.

Labour had proposed a National Education Service, as a counterpart to the National Health Service. Mr Corbyn's plans focused on a major boost to school funding, picking up on the concern about budget shortages that had been raised by headteachers.

Labour promised smaller class sizes, better pay for teachers and free meals for all primary pupils. There would also be a return for the Education Maintenance Allowance, which provided financial assistance to keep people in education beyond the age of 16.

The emphasis of schools' policy would be switched from academies and free schools to a more strategic role for local authorities.

But none of these plans, either from the Conservatives or Labour, show any immediate sign of progressing, caught in the political gridlock of a government without a majority.

Education policies can take many years to develop and implement. They need enough political continuity to get from the concept to the classroom. But with the disruptions of two General Elections and a referendum in three years, any attempt to make headway with policy has struggled.

As the academic year ends, the political landscape is filled with uncertainty, with big ideological

changes giving way to a more low-key, pragmatic approach. Until the next political earthquake.

The rise and fall of grammar schools



Nicky Morgan, who was Education Secretary under Cameron, joined in calls opposing the planned legislation that would introduce academic selection

The prospect of the return of grammar schools in England has been a long-running saga, which this year seemed to come to a conclusion.

Under David Cameron's premiership, Education Secretaries had put an emphasis on increasing the number of academies and opening hundreds of free schools. The talk had been of 'academisation' and legislation had provided mechanisms that relentlessly shifted more schools from local authorities into academy trusts. The debate over grammars had always evoked strong feelings, both for and against, but under Cameron's leadership the cause of returning to selection had remained outside of the main thrust of Conservative education policy. Labour and the Liberal Democrats had been consistently opposed.

When Nicky Morgan had been Education Secretary there had been some movement at the margins, when it was decided that an existing grammar school could open another campus in another town, without this being

interpreted as a 'new' school. The creation of new grammar schools was not lawful, but Mrs Morgan's ruling meant that a so-called 'annexe' to an existing grammar was permissible.

This had stirred the grammar supporters to call for a new wave of these local expansions. But this would only be relevant in areas where there were already grammars and Mrs Morgan had made clear that this was not a signal that the floodgates were going to be open for a return for selection. This was going to be the exception rather than the rule.

Theresa May's arrival as Prime Minister in the post-referendum summer of 2016 completely changed the debate. Mrs May and her close advisers were much more sympathetic to the cause of bringing back academic selection and soon this was revealed as a major theme for her administration.

With Justine Greening as Education Secretary, the Government set out plans to remove the ban on creating new grammars. It was not clear how many new selective schools would be created, but there would no longer be a legislative barrier. The ban on increasing selection by ability would be lifted.

Mrs May presented her support for grammars as part of a wider push on creating more good school places. She argued that grammar schools had high attainment, including for disadvantaged pupils, and were sought-after by parents. When they offered examples of excellence, it was absurd to actively stop their expansion, said the Prime Minister, particularly in areas that were starved of good school places.

The Government argued that in too many parts of the country families did not have access to schools that were likely to achieve high results and so the push for grammars would be alongside expansions in faith schools and academies supported by independent schools and universities. This was the new focus of education policy. The more places created in such high-achieving schools, the more opportunities would be available to help pupils succeed.

The new grammars would also have to be available to poorer families – including those described by Downing Street as ‘just about managing’ and ‘ordinary working families’. There were suggestions this would mean entrance systems relying on more than the raw 11-plus exam results, such as setting aside a number of places for disadvantaged pupils. The tests would have to be ‘tutor-proof’ so that better off families could not buy an advantage with many expensive hours of private tutoring.

Not only would new grammars have to be seen to have such inclusive admissions policies, this would also mean changes for existing grammars. They too would be expected to show that being academically selective did not mean that they were socially exclusive.

This was no longer an equivocation about whether a grammar school ‘annexe’ was or wasn’t a new school. This was a clear commitment to re-introducing the principle of selection by ability of a kind that no Government had made for decades.

But there was strong opposition.

Teachers’ unions had long been against expanding academic selection, arguing that no matter what conditions were applied for entry tests, grammar schools would always work to the advantage of wealthier families and would never be equitable.

Headteachers were exasperated that millions were being made available to



Theresa May, on assuming leadership, looked to remove the ban on creating new grammar schools

experiment with new grammars, when the rest of the school system was, in their words, ‘cash starved’.

Former Chief Inspector of Schools, Michael Wilshaw, still playing an outspoken role in education debates, said bringing back grammars would undermine years of progress in raising standards in mixed-ability comprehensives.

He argued that for every grammar school created with the highest achieving 25% of pupils, it would mean that three other schools would have to be created without a top stream. He asked whether parents really wanted three quarters of local schools to become secondary moderns?

Former Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, also joined the critics of a return to grammars, writing alongside former Liberal Democrat Leader, Nick Clegg, and former Labour Shadow Education Secretary, Lucy Powell, that expanding selection was not the way to push for social mobility.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s (OECD) education chief, Andreas Schleicher, weighed in on the debate to say that the international evidence suggested that academic selection tended to improve the chances of those who were already rich – but without any improvement to overall standards.

The battle lines were drawn. The two sides seemed implacably opposed – with both those for and against grammars saying they were acting in the cause of promoting social mobility – and both sides furiously contesting the claims of their opponents.

The battleground for deciding the outcome proved to be the General Election. This was the Conservatives’

flagship education policy – and with their failure to secure a majority, the return of grammars was wrecked on the rocks.

At the beginning of 2017, this re-birth of grammar schools had seemed closer than at any time for 50 years. It seemed to be in touching distance. A few months later, before schools broke up for the summer holidays, it seemed further away than ever.

Schools campaign for better funding



A widespread campaign lead by teachers’ unions and allies has decried the shortage of funding for schools

The biggest education story to emerge from the General Election, in terms of doorstep issues and public debates, was the question of school funding. There were concerns that state schools were suffering from cash shortages, with reports of parents being asked to make contributions to cover budget shortfalls.

This should not have been a surprise to any of the political parties, because there had been a sustained, increasingly vocal campaign running through the year over what school leaders had called a ‘funding crisis’.

This was a claim rejected by the Government, who said repeatedly that school budgets had been protected. But school leaders, often important figures in their local communities, were emphatic that they faced an unsustainable real-terms cut in budgets.

There had been lobbying by teachers’ unions and local publicity about the impact of funding shortages on individual schools. This had been supplemented by regional organisations of headteachers who had become adept users of media and social media to put out their messages over what they saw as a damaging funding squeeze.

There were also parents’ groups adding to this groundswell of concern over school budgets and some governors in West Sussex announced an unprecedented one-day ‘strike’ as a protest over inadequate funding.

In one single, co-ordinated message, headteachers across the South of England sent a joint letter to the families of about two million pupils, telling parents that unless school budgets were improved, there would be staff cuts, subjects dropped and fewer support services.

This very direct form of campaigning put pressure on MPs and turned school funding into a major public debate.

Teachers and headteachers claimed that their warnings were backed by independent evidence. The National Audit Office said that schools would face a £3 billion funding shortfall by 2019–20. This would mean real-terms cuts of 8% for schools, the public spending watchdog warned.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies said that schools faced falling budgets for the first time in two decades and another £3.7 billion would be needed for school budgets to maintain current levels of spending.

Although school funding came to be seen as a single campaign – there were two distinct parts to this question. There was the debate over the overall size of the school budget – and there was a separate debate about how it was allocated to individual schools.

The overall budget, which was over £40 billion in 2016–17, was defended by the Government as running at record levels. But headteachers argued that it had failed to keep pace with additional costs, such as rising numbers of pupils and higher employer charges for National Insurance.

But a much thornier question was how it was divided. For many years there had been complaints that there were unacceptable differences in the level of funding in different parts of the country and that these anomalies had to be resolved. A school in Barnsley only receives half the per pupil funding of a school facing similar challenges in Hackney in East London.

But trying to unpick this, within the context of limited overall budgets, was immensely difficult.

Education Secretary Justine Greening grasped this nettle in December 2016, when she issued a new National Funding Formula. This proposed a different allocation of funding, intended to resolve historic unfairness, but with a phased, transitional approach, which would limit the increases and decreases for individual schools.

Although there was a widespread recognition that such a reform was needed, there was only a lukewarm reception for the proposed new arrangements. Those who would lose

money – such as in the big cities – were unsurprisingly unenthusiastic, while some of those who had previously felt seriously underfunded still felt not enough was being changed. There was still backbench grumbling from MPs who were facing local pressure.

Headteachers saw the new proposals as shuffling around an inadequate amount of overall funding. Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said that a change in distribution would not tackle a ‘fundamental lack of investment’.

The arguments over funding continued into the General Election. The Conservatives promised that no school would lose out from the funding formula, with plans to release money by scrapping universal free meals for infants. But Labour wanted to make school funding one of their key messages, promising an even more significant increase in school budgets, with a pledge of £20 billion in investment by 2022.

With neither side achieving a majority in the election, it meant that both funding plans were put on hold – while schools were still campaigning about their need for extra cash. Headteachers wrote a letter to MPs demanding answers on what was going to happen next.

Would the Treasury loosen the purse strings and find extra money for schools? Would this become an example of showing that the Government was listening to a public mood that seemed to be less willing to accept more cuts and austerity? There was intense speculation whether there would be a shift in attitudes to public spending.

But when Ms Greening’s announcement on funding came in July it was another kind of balancing act. There would be another £1.3 billion put into school budgets over two years, but it would not be new money. Instead it would be taken from other budgets, including free schools, and be reallocated to core spending. It would be enough to make



Angela Rayner, Shadow Education Secretary, has pressured the government to increase school budgets

sure that for two years schools would have budgets that were protected in real-terms.

Headteachers offered a cautious welcome to the funding announcement as a 'step in the right direction'. They were pleased that there seemed to be a recognition from Ministers that there was a genuine problem. But there were accusations from the National Union of Teachers that this was only 'smoke and mirrors' and that switching around budgets was not a substitute for extra

funding. The extra money for two years would not make up for the real-term cuts already imposed.

The announcement on school spending was made to the House of Commons in the last week before parliament broke up for the summer. It promised a temporary reprieve in the worries about funding and it showed that ministers were listening. But it is unlikely to be the end of the matter, with more tough decisions about money lying ahead for both school leaders and the Government.

Teachers' pay does not break the public sector pay cap



The public sector pay cap has created tension between the Government and those in education

There are more than half a million teachers in England and Wales and their pay has been capped for the past seven years, as part of restraints on pay affecting more than five million public sector workers.

This began with a pay freeze in 2010 which lasted two years, after which the pay limit became a series of 1% increases, with teachers' pay grinding along as part of the process of austerity and efforts to improve the public finances.

After the June election there was widespread speculation that public

sector workers might this year begin to escape the long shadow of the financial crisis. There were apparent signals, including from within the Government, that it might be time to take off the shackles and offer some more extensive increases to staff in schools, the health service and emergency services.

But after much debate about 'will they or won't they' lift the pay cap, the response from Ministers to the School Teachers' Review Body report was that pay would still be kept at 1%. The Government was sticking to its guns over public sector pay and teachers would not be the first to breach it.

According to the National Union of Teachers, the successive years of below-inflation increases had left teachers with a 13% real-terms pay cut. This was difficult for individual teachers, who had seen their earnings falling against inflation. But there was a wider challenge for the profession, with such a stagnation in pay being seen as exacerbating problems with staff recruitment.

Heads have been complaining bitterly about what they see as a 'recruitment crisis', particularly in some shortage subjects, such as science, maths and

languages. The prospect of another year with a real-terms pay cut has been seen as making it even more difficult to bring bright young graduates into the profession.

These concerns were raised not only by the teachers' unions. The pay review body itself highlighted some serious concerns about the implications for recruitment, saying that there were already 'substantial pressures' and that targets for recruiting new teachers had been missed for five years in a row.

The review body said there was a 'real risk that schools will not be able to recruit and retain a workforce of high-quality teachers to support pupil achievement.'

The topic of pay was interlocked with funding, not just for the Department for Education, but even more widely in terms of the economic path to be taken by the Government after losing its majority. Would there be less emphasis on austerity or would the focus remain on keeping down public spending? After the election result, the prospect of continued belt-tightening seemed to be becoming increasingly unappetising.

Even the modest pay round that was announced – only adding a few pounds a week to the starting salary for teachers – was forecast to mean an extra £505 million on the Department for Education's overall pay bill, taking

it to over £25 billion. This pay lift will have to come from existing budgets, adding to the pressure on school finances. If there had been a pay rise keeping up with inflation, let alone a real-terms increase, it would have meant a much more substantial slice of extra funding.

Headteachers said they wanted to see a more generous pay deal than had been offered, but they warned that any pay rise had to be accompanied with adequate funding. They wanted to see pay addressed alongside the bigger picture of an improved funding deal.

The pay review body's report acknowledged that 'many schools will face both real-terms reductions in the level of per-pupil funding and growing cost pressures. Difficult choices may be inescapable'. In such circumstances, even though better pay is needed for recruiting and retaining good staff, the review body says 'some schools will find it challenging to implement any pay uplift at all'.

In the end, teachers were not the first to go through the public sector pay limit and ministers imposed another year of a 1% pay cap. The Government argued that it was a fair deal for teachers and the taxpayer. But teachers' unions complained of a failure to address the recruitment shortage and the need for teachers to be adequately rewarded.



Schools have argued that the lack of pay increases is leading to a recruitment crisis, particularly in STEM subjects

GCSEs changing to a new type of grading

This will be the first year for a new way of grading GCSEs. Instead of students being awarded A*s or As or Bs and all the way through to G, there will be a new calibration introduced, with the number 9 as the pinnacle and then going down to 1 as the lowest.

This will at first only be for maths and English language and literature, with

other GCSEs to be phased in to use this numerical system over the next couple of years. It will mean that for a while both the numerical and alphabetical systems will work alongside each other. But eventually it will mean the end of using letter grades of the kind that have been used for GCSEs since they were introduced in the 1980s.



What effect the change in exam style will have on boys and girls' grades is one of many questions that remains to be answered

It will also mean that a GCSE awarded in England will be graded in terms of numbers, while GCSEs in Wales and Northern Ireland will still keep with the letter grades.

Apart from the unfamiliar change to number grades and being slightly counter-intuitive to have a scoring system working downwards from 9, there will be other adjustments.

In the old alphabetical system, a grade C had become established as a widely-used measure of a pass. When people spoke of a 'good' GCSE, it was understood to mean a grade C and above. But the new numerical system will have two forms of a pass – with a 4 being seen as a 'standard' pass, while a grade 5 will be seen as a 'strong' pass.

It is also going to become much more difficult to achieve the very highest grade. While As and A*s became increasingly widely awarded, the grade 9 is going to be a rarer sighting, available to only the extremely able. The intention is to have a system of grades that gives a more detailed impression of a student's ability, with a more differentiated scale than the outgoing system of letters.

This is all part of the culmination of long years of planning for curriculum and exam changes. The new grades are a signal for a new type of qualification. These are meant to be more rigorous, with less coursework and a greater emphasis on final exams. In maths, there is significantly more content than the previous version of the GCSE.

There are also changes being phased in at A-level, being separated from AS-levels and decided by final exams rather than coursework or continuous assessment.

The outcomes of such changes will be intensely scrutinised and there will be attention for any unintended consequences. Will the new ultra-high grade 9 at GCSE become the preserve of independent schools and only a few top state schools? How will the change in exam style affect the results of girls and boys? How will changes to A-levels affect entrance to university? And will there be acceptance of the new system by employers and the wider general public?

Such changes to exams are the latest point in a long, slow process, following years of upheaval to the curriculum and course content. There will still be another couple of years of implementation of the new GCSEs and A-levels and presumably readjustments still to come if there are any teething problems or unexpected turbulence in the results.

But this is beginning to put in place the ideas for a more robust exam system, scrapping the modules and coursework, that had been proposed six or more years ago. It has taken this long to reach the new-look GCSEs and it will take a few more years still to see how they will be established. By then, no doubt, it will be time for the next upheaval.

Schools warn of teacher shortages

Along with funding, the most recurrent concern raised by school leaders has been about difficulties with recruiting teachers. In particular there have been warnings in secondary schools about the lack of teachers for subject specialists, such as science, maths, computing or modern languages.

This isn't a new problem. But this year the warnings seemed to become more insistent and MPs on the education select committee complained that there didn't seem to be a clear strategy on how to stop the problem getting worse. In February, the cross-party committee of MPs highlighted 'significant teacher shortages' and said that there needed to be more effective efforts to improve the recruitment and retention of staff.

Earlier in the school year, a ministerial answer had revealed that about a third of teachers who qualified in 2010 had left the profession by 2015. In terms of staff numbers, retaining existing staff had become as important as attracting new recruits.

The struggle to find an adequate supply of good teachers was claimed by headteachers as having direct consequences for standards. For subjects such as maths and physics, it was not acceptable to rely on cover teachers without in-depth subject knowledge. Depending on temporary, supply staff was seen as a poor substitute for permanent, specialist teachers.

But while school leaders spoke of a 'teacher shortage crisis', ministers could point to record numbers of teachers in schools. The government has been running a £1.3 billion recruitment campaign and they could say that it had been successful, with no sign of any reduction in staffing levels, despite the warnings of teachers' unions.

But this is a difficult, moving target. The rising number of teachers has to keep



Recruiting teachers for STEM and language departments has become increasingly difficult for schools

up with a rapidly increasing number of pupils. There has been a population boom in the secondary school age group, requiring more classes, schools and teachers. This shows no sign of slowing down, with the latest forecasts published in the summer showing that secondary school numbers will rise by a fifth in the next decade. This will mean providing places and teachers for more than half a million additional secondary school pupils.

Recruitment also has to keep up with the turnover of staff, replacing teachers who are leaving the profession or reaching retirement. Every year 30,000 new teachers are required for the staff/pupil ratio just to stand still. A report from the National Foundation for Educational Research showed that those most likely to leave teaching were among those who were most needed. Maths, science and language teachers had particularly high rates of leaving teaching within five years of qualifying, further compounding the staff shortages in these subjects. Maths teachers were about twice as likely to leave as PE teachers.

Figures in March showed a drop in students accepting places on teacher training courses, suggesting no immediate end in sight for recruitment problems. But it is also a reminder that teacher recruitment operates in

the context of the wider economy, regardless of the changing demands of classroom numbers.

A career in teaching is traditionally seen as a safe haven in times of recession, with applications rising when the jobs market is tighter. But when the cycle turns, and more jobs are available, teaching usually finds it more of a struggle to recruit. The response to this might be to find ways to make teaching a more attractive option, but this becomes more difficult when pay has been restrained by public sector limits. Teachers have faced successive years of wage restraint and the School Teachers' Review Body specifically highlighted concerns that if pay continues to slip behind it will become increasingly difficult for schools to find and keep the right staff.

With little flexibility over pay, the Department for Education has

emphasised other factors, such as trying to address concerns over teachers' workload and cut unnecessary paperwork. Such measures are seen as a way of reducing the numbers who might leave the profession.

There could also be more ambitious projects to encourage applications. During the election campaign, the Conservatives promised that they would allow teachers not to pay back their tuition fees as long as they remained in the profession. Such relief on tuition fees would potentially save teachers tens of thousands in repayments, providing a financial incentive to enter teaching and then to stick at it as a long-term career.

When this will be implemented remains uncertain, but its proposal suggests an awareness of the need to make teacher recruitment a priority.

Pisa tests reveal international comparisons



Singapore achieved the highest score in the Pisa tests

This was the equivalent of World Cup year for education systems across the developed world, as the results of the international Pisa tests were published – which once again showed the UK as a middle-ranking performer and making little progress on the last round of tests three years ago.

These exams – the Programme for International Student Assessment, but usually known as 'Pisa tests' – provide

a ranking of about 70 countries and education systems, showing comparative standards among 15-year olds in maths, science and reading.

With economic performance being linked to education standards, governments around the world have become quietly obsessed with how well their countries score in the Pisa tests and whether they can climb up towards the powerhouses at the top of the rankings. Run by the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Pisa rankings have become the predominant international measure of education systems.

When the latest results were published in December, the highest achieving countries were once again in Asia. Singapore was the highest scoring of all – coming first in all three subject areas. The city state, which only gained independence in 1965, had overtaken the world in school standards.

At independence, it had been a country with a poor, often illiterate population, with few skills for the jobs market.

But it had pursued a sustained focus on education as a cornerstone of economic prosperity. Now it had been lauded as having the best-educated young population in the world.

The success was attributed to a relentless and systematic approach to improving school standards and to the quality of its teachers, who are recruited from among the top graduates and then given much professional training during their careers.

Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Vietnam and Hong Kong were also successful. Although the previous top performer, the Chinese city of Shanghai, was now included in a wider measure of four Chinese provinces, this collective Chinese entry was still among the high achievers.

Among Western countries, Estonia, Finland and Canada all performed well.

The UK came 15th in science, 22nd in reading and 27th in maths, but the scores showed little significant improvement on three years ago, when the results were dismissed as evidence of 'stagnating' standards. When the results were broken down into the separate education systems, England was ahead of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

But the results for the UK were less than inspiring – described by the OECD's Director of Education, Andreas Schleicher, as 'flat in a changing world'.

While countries such as Singapore, South Korea and Vietnam seemed to be in a hurry to improve and racing ahead, the UK seemed to be running on the spot.

This prompted a spate of soul searching in the UK about what was going wrong. After years of initiatives and reforms promising to improve the

education system, there seemed to be little tangible proof that it had been effective.

In England, Pisa results in 2010 and 2013 could be claimed by Conservative ministers as the overhang of a system created by the previous Labour administration. But after three successive Conservative education secretaries, and rafts of changes to the education system, responsibility was much more firmly on the shoulders of the current Government.

The National Association of Head Teachers described the outcome as evidence of a 'lost decade' for England's education system. The headteachers blamed an excessive political focus on school structures rather than standards – with so much attention having been paid to issues such as trying to change schools into academies or to put them into academy trusts. From the Pisa results, the heads argued that such administrative changes did not seem to have translated to higher standards.

The National Union of Teachers argued that there needed to be more attention paid to immediate problems, such as tackling a shortage of teachers.

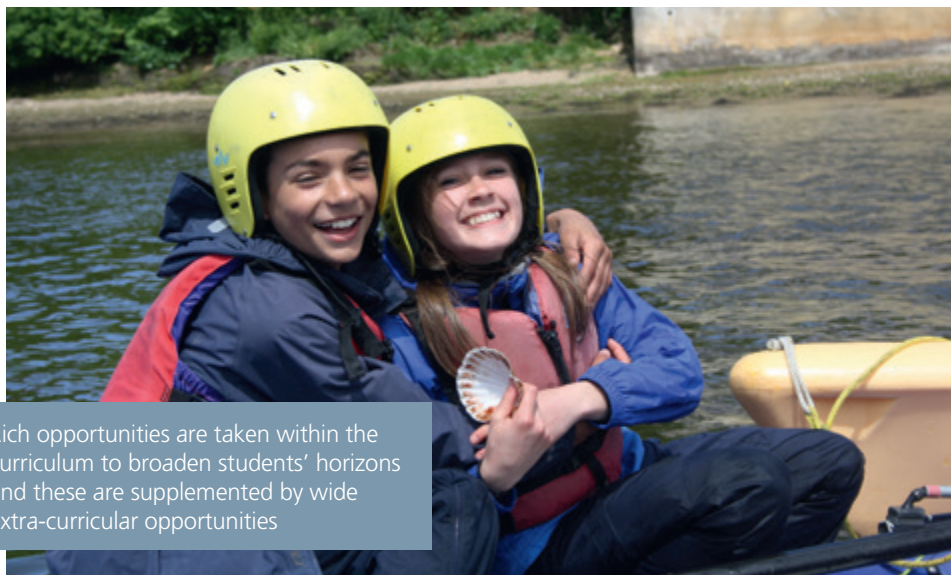
Teach First, a charity which recruits graduates into teaching, said the results were a case of 'must try harder' for the UK's education systems, after little substantial progress in the tests since the previous results were published in 2013.

The Pisa rankings had been published at the time when grammar schools seemed to be destined to return and Schools Minister, Nick Gibb, suggested that creating grammar places could be the way to boost results in future. In retrospect, the grammar plan proved to be a dead end rather than a way out – and in three years Ministers will have to find another reason to explain the success or disappointment in results.



Andreas Schleicher, Director of Education for the OECD, was critical of the UK's performance in the tests

The Market Bosworth School



Rich opportunities are taken within the curriculum to broaden students' horizons and these are supplemented by wide extra-curricular opportunities



Stuart Wilson, Principal

For more than a decade, our school's mission statement has been: 'Educating with care to encourage success for all'. Despite the vast changes we have seen in recent years, this remains at the heart of our values. While we are rightly proud of our academic successes, our core aim continues to be the welfare of all students within our school community, ensuring their learning is life-long and goes beyond the classroom. This applies as much to staff as it does to students. Our focus is not only on arduous marking reviews and lesson observations, though these are important. There is also a high level of professional trust that people here do what they are supposed to and put their students' needs first.

The conversion to an academy in 2012 was an important move for us in terms of autonomy. Many schools in Leicestershire have had to make difficult decisions regarding age range conversion. Academy status has given us the opportunity to set our own agenda and ensure that we make the right decisions for our students. We are also lucky to have a committed team of governors behind us, who bring a range of experience to our school and aid us with tough decisions on finance and curriculum changes.

Managing change

The educational landscape has changed dramatically in the last five years. At The Market Bosworth School we have seen additional changes due to our age range conversion from 11–14 to 11–16 years. In the space of two years, age range change

REPORT CARD

- » Principal: Stuart Wilson
- » Ofsted grading: Outstanding
- » Number of students: 825
- » Approximately 40 teaching staff, 60 support staff
- » Converted age range from 11–14 to 11–16 in 2014
- » Serves a diverse and wide geographical area
- » Ability on intake broadly national average (27.9 in 2017)
- » Higher than average number of students with Special Educational Needs
- » 2016 Outcomes: A* to C in maths and English 82%
- » Overall Progress 8: 0.30
- » Positive progress 8 for Pupil Premium, SEN, EAL, Boys and Girls of all Key Stage 2 ability groups.

“This is an outstanding academy. Students flourish in an environment that fosters their academic progress and their wider social development”

Ofsted

meant student numbers increased from 600 to nearly 900 and over 40 new staff were recruited with a short space of time. This is a challenge for any school. Our focus was to recruit the highest quality subject specialists to drive the development of our new GCSE curriculum without losing sight of our historic strengths. Given our broadly average intake, outcomes for 2016 were phenomenal, with over 82% of students achieving maths and English at levels A* to C.

These results were a testament to the way in which all staff embraced change and to their proactive approach and collective aspirations.

We are not afraid of change. The stakeholder voice is extremely valuable to us; we listen to both staff and students and have made changes based on their opinions. We are incredibly proud of the way that students conduct themselves every day and this was celebrated by Ofsted which said ‘The behaviour of students is exemplary in their classes and around the academy.’ Even with such praise, we still strive for improvement. In 2016 we implemented a more rigorous policy to build further and improve consistency through positive discipline.

Our aim is to offer students the best possible start in life, regardless of their background. There is a misconception that, due to our picturesque rural setting, our intake is solely of high-ability, affluent students.

The academy's curriculum is outstanding





New Classrooms have been built with the support of government funding for school expansion

This couldn't be further from the truth. Only 60 of our students live in the village of Market Bosworth itself. Our student intake is from a wide and diverse catchment area and, indeed, our 'class of 2017' were below the national average ability on entry at Year 7. We, like many schools, have found that some of the curriculum reforms are particularly challenging for weaker students. As a smaller than average secondary school, our Ket Stage 4 curriculum structure is acutely constrained by

finance. In addition, the introduction of Progress 8 (the Government's new school performance measure) means that we must now, more than ever, support the individual strengths of all students to achieve outstanding outcomes. We have placed an increased focus on intervention at all ability levels, building in flexibility where possible. This, at times, means making decisions which are right for students, even if they are not right for league tables.



The behaviour of students is exemplary in their classes and around the academy

» WHAT NEXT FOR THE MARKET BOSWORTH SCHOOL?

'I am often asked by visitors to our school what the key to our continued success is. On reflection, I believe the answer is the quality of relationships that exist between staff and students. They are based on shared goals, a community spirit and a genuine love of learning.

These values are built upon every day in our school and are at the centre of what we do. In recent years, a key focus for our school has been managing change in a way that doesn't impact on what has been at the heart of our success: personal relationships.

We want The Market Bosworth School to be the best in the country. A lofty ambition; but why not? There are lots of reasons why we strive to be the best, so let's start at the top of the list, as we believe our students deserve nothing less.' Stuart Wilson, Principal.



“Students make rapid and sustained progress at the academy. They achieve high standards in all their subjects”

Ofsted

Witchford Village College



Chris Terry, Headteacher



Achieve at Witchford:
Achieve for Life

In September 2014, Witchford Village College undertook a radical rebranding of itself including a tighter focus on target setting, achievement and progress. This was all encompassed under the mantra of 'no child left behind' and a symbol of the change was a new uniform.

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Chris Terry
- » Location: Cambridgeshire
- » 822 in roll
- » Number of teachers: 53
- » Number of teaching assistants: 10
- » Specialist Autism Unit: 10 staff

When I took over the college my Senior Team and I recognised the need to move the school forward with a greater focus on progress and achievement. This need was highlighted by the Ofsted report in February 2015 that placed the college into Requires Improvement. However, just 18 months later in October 2017 the college was redesignated as Good showing the effects of the new improvement plan. 'Achieve at Witchford, achieve for life' became the motto and slogan for the college amidst its re-branding of itself in summer 2014, shortly after the new Principal, took over in September 2013. The re-branding consisted of a new college uniform, a tighter focus on target setting and outcomes for all pupils, as well as a mantra of 'no child left behind' that permeated the college and its unique ethos.

The report highlights many areas of significant strength 'Pupils make good progress. This results from effective planning, strong teacher knowledge of the subject material and how best to teach it, good behaviour, and effective working relationships,' Ofsted concluded.

This endorsement from the Inspection Team, recognising the hard work and improvements made, will allow us to concentrate and refine our work further to provide even better provision for our students in the future.

Pupils arrive at Witchford below the national average in all year groups. In particular, the college has a greater proportion in all year groups of students with low prior attainment.

22% of students are eligible for free school meals (FSM). Only a very small proportion of students come from minority ethnic groups.

Only a small percentage of parents have higher education and aspirations can be low. Over three quarters of students travel to and from the college on buses for which the college pays and these enable students to participate in extra-curricular activities.

In order to increase capacity, the college has just become a member of a multi-academy trust, called the Morris Education Trust. The new trust consists of Impington Village College, a large 11–18 mixed comprehensive school and Cavendish, a newly-constituted free school.

Our vision is to grow a family of schools and colleges which are individual in character but united by a passion that we:

- » Will build a better world through education
- » Are stronger through community
- » Will achieve excellence as standard for all.

Our family of schools will be bound by a shared set of values:

- » We value world class outcomes in progress, attainment and development for all

- » We are a community of responsible, caring individuals who value the promotion and creation of a collaborative culture underpinned by positive human relationships
- » We value the opportunity for all to engage in lifelong learning with creative freedom, enabling them to continue, develop and progress
- » Wholly inclusive, we celebrate diversity and understand individual needs; we will cultivate a global outlook and prepare all to be international citizens.

The College needed a direction and a transparency in terms of its decision making and aspirations. The first task on our journey then was to share with all staff the need to redress our target setting process.

As a result we saw a 15% rise in the targets suggested by the established Fischer Family Trust D target that had been used up to this point. The move saw all pupils, particularly in Year 11, realise that there was no longer a glass ceiling to their aspirations and so began the move to change to the mindset of our pupils.

A swift decision to re-introduce work experience for all pupils followed, as well as a conscious paradigm shift to deliberately bring careers education back into the main school curriculum. For the young people of the college, the re-provision of this opportunity was crucial.

“Leaders have successfully driven improvement over the last two years. This is apparent across all aspects of the college”

Ofsted 2016

The local area has an interesting demographic. Being situated just outside the historic and picturesque Cathedral City of Ely in Cambridgeshire, the college enjoys the benefits of being rural whilst being able to access the conurbations of Cambridge and Ely. However, for a significant number of our pupils, access to the city is restricted due to the impact that the costs of travel has on family budgets. Approximately one fifth of the pupils in the college are in receipt of free school meals or the Pupil Premium grant. Access to work-related learning is crucial for our pupils in order for them to have the aspirations to rise above their own expectations and seek a wider set of possibilities.

Reception area housing displays of students' work





Practical learning is key
in science lessons



Music is the soul of the
College

“Pupil premium funding has been used effectively to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils”
Ofsted

Over the past three years, 100% of the pupils who left us in July were in further education or employment with training by September.

However, it is not just about the support to our current pupils but also support for the community. In our adult education provision we are currently 85% of the way towards our target of 250 adult earners. This target has now been split into 225 learners universally and 25 hard to reach learners. There are several categories that need to be fulfilled to meet the criteria of hard to reach one being improved employability and we are working on this at the present time. Our Computerised Accounts and Bookkeeping students are aiming to achieve their City and Guilds qualifications.

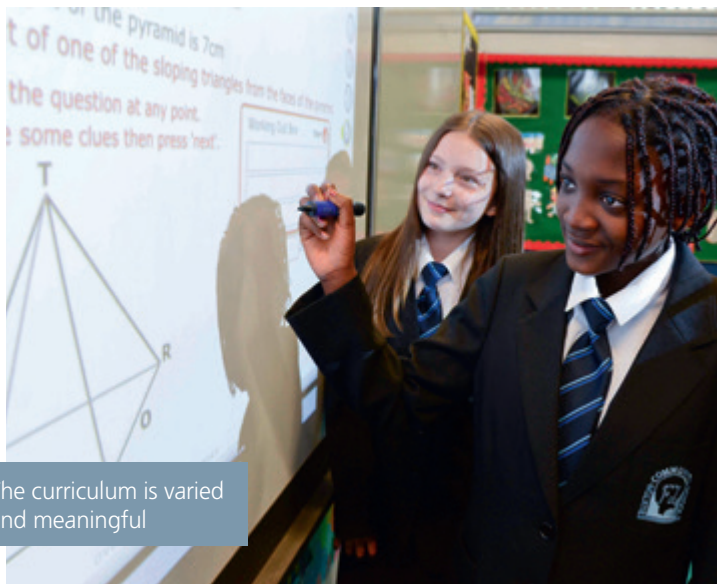
Looking at the future we need to invest in the curriculum and build

on our three-year programme of increasing the curriculum offer.

- » Phase one (Sept 2014):
Hair and Beauty; Photography;
Child Development; Product
Design; widened access to single
science courses
- » Phase two (sept 2015): Business
Studies; Horticulture; *European
Computer Driving License (ECDL)*;
Computer Science
- » Phase three (Sept 2016) Construction
and the Built Environment, Triple
Science in the option block,
Further Maths and Statistics in the
option block.

Going further, we need to develop our tracking systems which has a greater focus on individual pupils to ensure every pupil can maximise their potential.

Buxton Community School



The curriculum is varied and meaningful



Headteacher Craig Yates with students

When I became Headteacher of Buxton Community School in January 2015 I arrived to find a caring and inclusive school. The problem was that it had lost its focus on student progress and this was undermining the school's capacity for improvement. I identified key concerns as priorities for immediate action: there was a decline in outcomes and a visit from OFSTED was due. Student numbers were falling and consequently creating concerns over the financial state of the school. I quickly put in place two strategies to turn around the situation. The first was a widely-shared, clear focus on a small number of key actions that would drive us upwards from our current position; the second was to clearly establish the quality standard that would be met in every aspect of the school.

We have a good staff who needed greater clarity and direction and I began by reorganising key structures to create clear lines of communication and accountability at every level. We continually review our systems to reflect the changing needs of the school. The appraisal process has been thoroughly reviewed and is now integrated into the school's quality assurance systems. Every member of staff can and must contribute to school improvement. At the centre of the new school ethos is impact. We constantly ask: why are we doing it? Does it work? How do we know? If it doesn't improve student progress, we change it. We question everything we do. The staff have substantial freedom in their roles but it is coupled with significant accountability.

REPORT CARD

- » Buxton Community School
- » Headteacher: Craig Yates
- » School type: 11–19 Comprehensive
- » Ofsted rating: Good with the capacity to improve
- » Number of teaching staff: 65
- » Number of students: 1,040 including Sixth Form

“Create an environment where teachers can teach well and students can learn effectively”

The next strategy was a drive to raise teachers’ expectations of what it is possible for our students to achieve. In our model every single student is targeted to achieve outcomes in line with the top 20% of students nationally who have the same starting point. It is tough but realistic and we won’t settle for being average. How we assess students is changed at every stage so teachers have a deeper and more evidence-based understanding of what progress looks and feels like. Our internal information is now incredibly accurate. We may not always like what it tells us, but we are better informed and more responsive than ever. Each member of staff is expected to have a thorough picture of every student they teach and to share with them as clearly as possible how to improve.

The curriculum was changed to allow students to spend more time in each subject so they are thoroughly prepared for the new terminal exams. The number of qualifications on offer was reduced. Each course that is

delivered is meaningful, students want to study it and it will have real world currency when they leave us.

To support staff and students in meeting the increase in expectations our progress teams were reorganised and their capacity has been significantly increased. They are twice the size they were previously with more pastoral managers and more progress leaders, and there is a discrete team responsible for improving outcomes with the most vulnerable and complex students. The school is now heavily involved in local learning communities and we readily offer and accept support as part of our drive to broaden and deepen the experience of our staff.

The third part of the plan has been changing the expectations and aspirations of the students. I want them to aim high and be confident they can succeed. There is a new uniform and rigorous standards of behaviour and conduct are clearly communicated.

Students believe in their own potential





Academic expectations
are high

We expect active engagement in the classroom and work hard so students understand what this means in practice. There has been a period of tough love with serious sanctions for the small number who didn't want to work with us.

There is a drive to raise aspirations. The students understand they can achieve much and they believe we will help them fulfil their potential. They need to be inspired and we offer unique opportunities such as visits to Icelandic volcanoes or Space City in Russia. Most activities are closer to home and we recently held our first alumni day. Over 40 former students came back to meet our current cohort. They provided a unique and powerful inspiration for the young people who are sitting in the same seats that they once occupied.

The cumulative impact has been transformative and outcomes have improved across the board. Attainment and progress indicators at Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 are the highest they have ever been; student numbers are rising, levels of attendance and

punctuality are at their best ever and exclusions are falling. After some significant restructuring we are as financially secure as anywhere can be at the present time.

Our OFSTED inspection came and we were judged to be Good. It commented on our drive, determination and capacity to improve the school. The parents, students and staff demonstrated their support for, and commitment to, the priorities and expectations that had been set out. We are proud of what we have done so far, but we know we have plenty more to do.

We want the best for our young people and we will not let it get more complicated than that. This clarity of purpose has created a real confidence across the school that we can achieve some spectacular outcomes despite the challenges all schools face. You won't hear people say we hope or we think...we say we will and we know. We are creating our own certainty about our future.

“We want the best for our young people and we will not let it get more complicated than that”

Debenham High School



William Halford-Thompson, Year 9 with Aidan Powell in the library



Headteacher Julia Upton with Head Girl and Boy, Emily Salisbury and Bradley Page

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Julia Upton
- » Location: Debenham, Suffolk (village population circa 3,000)
- » 11–16 Church of England Academy (est. 1964)
- » 678 students
- » 42 full-time equivalent teachers (39% part-time)
- » 2016 results:
 - » 5A*-C incl. maths and English: 80%
 - » Attainment 8 score: 58.9
 - » Progress 8 score 2016: 0.39 (0.10 in English and 0.54 in math)

Debenham High School is a relatively small school, but what it lacks in size it more than makes up for in ambition. When I took over the leadership of the school in April 2012 I did so from a Headteacher who had served for 23 years, taking it to an Ofsted Outstanding status.

Some might think that I was courting disaster in following such a legacy, especially for my first Headship. Leading such a school presents just as much of a challenge as turning around a failing school. What works? What could be improved? How do I convince others of the need for change? How would I reinvent the school in my image and confound the much-lauded expectations that 'I had big shoes to fill'? All questions that I grappled with on arrival.

When I walked through the door I knew that I needed to harness the strong sense of tradition and considerable experience of a skilled teaching team, but place this in a modern world context. Students are encouraged to know the school's history and to feel a part of a community, both past and present. However, this sense of tradition must not mean that this school is stagnant, far from it; to convince an already successful staff that we needed to improve further I knew that an evidence-based understanding of the ingredients of the best teaching and learning had to be at the heart of any change. To steal a representation from educator, Hywel Roberts 'good teachers have metaphorical wing mirrors, so that they can look back, reflect, learn and be better'.

It is the sense of perpetual forward motion, reflective practice and constant strive for excellence that keeps this school at the top of the league tables. In April 2016 the school was designated a lead Teaching School and now directs



Kathryn Reynolds in
Food and Nutrition



Annie Conway, Year 7
supported by Peer
Mentor, Bea Jackson,
Year 10

the work of the Mid Suffolk Teaching School Alliance. This has led the school to take an even greater part in the training of new teachers, provide relevant and purposeful continuous professional development opportunities for teachers in the local area at all stages of their careers, and encourage all those in education to use research to reflect upon their own practice and improve pedagogy. This is not a school that is resting on its laurels, but always looking for incremental growth and improvement.

It would be easier to characterise a school with such academic success as a production line focused on merely academic outcomes. This is emphatically not the case.

The values of compassion, generosity and respect lie at the heart of this Christian school. It is a multi-denominational school: yet the core Christian values are understood by all. One visitor described it as 'the Christian values run through Debenham High School like letters through a stick of rock'.

The school is resolute in the belief that success comes first and foremost from being valued and in having a positive mental wellbeing. The school works explicitly to create an atmosphere of trust and one in which all members of the school community are valued. Through working with a clinical psychologist the school has looked at what research can tell us about those who manage to balance the pressures of modern society.

“In the past five years the school has maintained its standing, ranking consistently in the top 10% in the country for attainment and progress”

» DEBENHAM HIGH SCHOOL WELLBEING FIVE A DAY

The wider ethos of the school ensures that students:

1. Have opportunities for, recognise and harness positive emotion
2. Engage in a range of activities to stretch the mind and create positive experiences
3. Have positive relationships and know that having someone that you can trust is as important as exercise and a healthy diet
4. Work for the good of others which helps us to feel valued and part of a community
5. Understand that the mastery of new skills takes time and patience.

Mr Tapscott assisting Elsie
Mason, Year 7 studying
quadratic graphs





Eve Poole, Woody Hilton, Scarlett Angove,
Josh Swinburne, Nerys Feeney-Howells



James Davies-Stokes, Sports Award
Winner 2017



Ewan McMyn and
Jenni Rochford
performing at the
Summer Concert

Student leadership is another aspect of school life that, as a new Headteacher, I wanted to strengthen, building on the traditional roles of Head Boy and Girl, Senior Prefect and House Captain. There are now student leaders in every year group. This, alongside the peer mentoring undertaken by age 13 students, creates an environment where students are given responsibility and they respond accordingly. Different student teams lead charity work each term and know that in so doing they are raising awareness

of the disadvantages of others, collecting money to support them and also taking personal development opportunities to lead others.

Expectations of all students are high and the school has been used in Department for Education (DfE) case studies for its work with the most disadvantaged. It achieves success with these students by demanding first and foremost high expectations of all in the classroom. It is acknowledged that some students will need more support than others to achieve their goals but challenging circumstances do not mean that they cannot or should not get there.

» DEBENHAM HIGH SCHOOL CORE THEMES

Pride

We are proud of the students at Debenham High School and we expect them to take a pride in everything that they do. We have high academic standards, a strong pastoral system and clear and fair discipline.

Participation

Students develop their talents within and beyond the classroom. Those soft skills of communication, teamwork, resilience and adaptability are equally as important as academic success. We achieve our best in all fields through considering our holistic wellbeing.

Responsibility

Students have the chance to demonstrate responsibility and develop leadership skills.

Excellence

Excellence doesn't happen overnight, incremental growth, practice and a growth mindset are at the heart of success.

I place a great deal of importance on involvement in the wider life of the school. All newcomers are expected to join at least two clubs. This insistence helps to create a social coherence to what could be a very fragmented intake, with many students joining from small village primary schools who join the school knowing only one or two other students. Student involvement in clubs helps to build friendships through genuine shared interests and reinforces the importance of a wider, more holistic development in line with the wellbeing themes.

Granville Sports College



The head boy and head girl putting forward suggestions for improvement to the head teacher, Jo Kingswood

Granville Sports College had a falling roll, a looming budget deficit and an unflattering position at the bottom of the Derbyshire performance table. Standards and academic results were inadequate. This is what faced Jo Kingswood when she was appointed in January 2015 – her first headship.

'Raising the bar'

The school had to be turned around. This needed everyone to unite in the vision that, no matter what their role in school, they needed to raise their game if we were going to raise the bar.

Among the first actions I took was to have face-to-face meetings with every staff member to recognise key issues from their perspective. They identified a small group of pupils perceived to be 'untouchable' who were impervious to the rules. This had led to staff feeling disempowered and often turning a blind eye to unwanted behaviour.

If behaviour is not good, teachers cannot teach, so a key priority was to instil in staff the confidence that the leadership team would support them and that with 70 staff all pulling together, things would change.

I introduced back to basics lesson expectations displayed in all rooms. This included common sense rules such as switching off mobile phones, bringing the correct equipment, not shouting out, talking only about work set and not answering back.

Good behaviour starts with pride in the school uniform, so non-uniform clothing such as hoodies were banned. Staff were reassured that if they enforced

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Jo Kingswood
- » Comprehensive school based in Swadlincote, Derbyshire
- » 560 pupils 11–16
- » Pupils predominantly from White British backgrounds
- » Slightly above average pupils eligible for free school meals
- » 39 teaching staff
- » Motto: 'the small school with a big heart'.

“If behaviour is not good, teachers cannot teach, so a key priority was to instil in staff the confidence that the leadership team would support them”

expectations in a calm, assertive manner, I would stand behind them 100%.

Of course, the ‘clamp down’ was not without challenge and some Year 11 pupils staged a protest in the school canteen, refusing to go to lessons or remove their hoodies. They wanted a show down. I decided to ignore them. About fifteen minutes later, when they realised I was not going to play ball, they began drifting back to lessons. Some parents complained and I advised them they might like to investigate other schools to which they could move their children that allowed hoodies – no one left.

We refer to it affectionately now as ‘hoodiegate’. The staff saw that by standing firm we could enforce the rules and improve the learning climate. Parents also got behind us, with the majority fully appreciating the wholesale changes we were making.

Raising teaching standards

Hand in hand with improving pupil behaviour was a relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning. I introduced a set of non-negotiable guidelines for good teaching which included: meeting the needs of all pupils; high pupil involvement in lessons; specific

marking and feedback; and purposeful activities geared to achieving learning outcomes.

Another key change was scrapping the five-day notice period staff were given for learning walks (a snapshot look at lessons). We needed to get the real picture of teaching across the school and too many teachers were planning the perfect lesson when they knew they were being observed but not maintaining standards when no one was watching. I introduced no notice learning walks with frank and focused feedback to be acted upon within 10 days. I also introduced a weekly teaching and learning briefing for all staff to share good practice.

Improving leadership at all levels and building staff morale

I identified the need for structural changes including a staffing re-organisation aimed at balancing the budget and ensuring all roles focused on pupil outcomes. The inherited structure was unsustainable and overloaded with generous Teaching and Learning Responsibility payments that were making no impact on pupil outcomes. I needed to ensure we were getting value for money so I re-wrote every job description at all levels with a focus on improvement and outcomes.

A relentless focus on improving the quality of teaching



Increased monitoring, higher expectations and a relentless focus on improvement inevitably led to a significant number of staff moving on. As I appoint new staff, I make sure they share my passion, are solution focused and share my belief that our pupils can and will achieve more.

The increased monitoring that was needed to improve teaching led to some staff feeling that senior leadership were trying to catch them out rather than them being good. Whilst teaching was improving, staff morale was not. To address this, we gave responsibility for monitoring and improving teaching and learning to middle leaders who were usually Heads of Department. This empowered middle leaders and the staff appreciated the process was developmental, not a fault-finding mission. This also freed up senior leaders to focus on other issues.

To improve morale, we identified ways to bring some much-needed fun into the team to build unity. We've had numerous school leadership team vs staff challenges and activities. These have included a bake off competition and a volleyball match. While bringing staff together, it also showed the senior leadership's human side in a fun and social situation.

Raising aspirations

Getting our pupils to believe in themselves, to aim high and aspire to the top grades was also key to our improvement journey. Steps were taken to challenge pupils to think big, so I created an 'Achievement and Aspiration Team' with the remit of improving the quality of careers education and guidance and increasing engagement with businesses, universities and employers.

In 2016, an alumni network was also established, allowing ex-students to celebrate and share their success



with current pupils. By seeing the achievements of pupils who went before them, they could see the exciting possibilities of their future, whether going to university or entering the working world in an exciting, prospect-filled industry.

The journey continues

More than two years on, our improvement journey is far from complete but encouraging signs are there, with tangible change taking place. Our Ofsted Report, conducted in July 2015, noted that 'pupils wear their uniform with pride' and senior leaders had 'rapidly created a culture where teaching is improving strongly and where students behave well'. Despite being judged as Requires Improvement, we were graded Good for Leadership and Management and Behaviour and Safety. Our efforts were also acknowledged in a letter received in April 2016 from the former Head of Ofsted, Sir Michael Wilshaw.

Our student admission numbers are rising and our September intake is now oversubscribed. There has certainly been a step change and, although we have work to do, we are a school heading in the right direction.

“As I appoint new staff, I make sure they share my passion, are solution focused and share my belief that our pupils can and will achieve more”

Manor High School



Liam D Powell, Headteacher



Dr Kellet, Head of Science, inspiring Year 9 students through their first year of GCSEs

I was appointed Headteacher in April 2012. Friends and colleagues thought that I was mad to take on a school with a 10-14 age range because it would be career limiting and frustrating. However, from a visit prior to application, I could see that the school had great energy and creativity. Having spent two decades in 11-18 schools, where there was a huge focus on examination results, I was impressed to see a focus on year groups that are sometimes overlooked in schools.

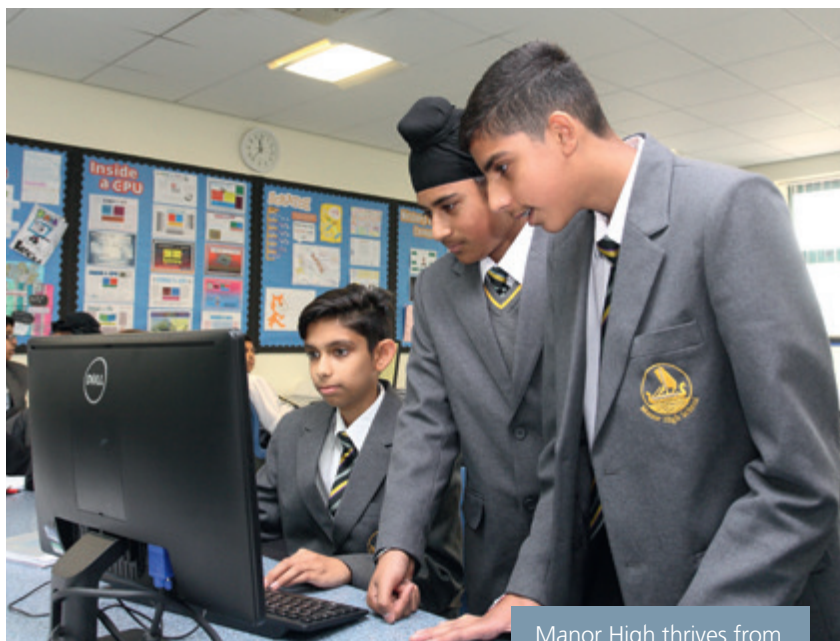
REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Liam D Powell
- » Location: Oadby, Leicestershire
- » Students on roll: 965
- » SEN: 69 students
- » Number of teachers: 50

The school was well established in an affluent setting. It was built in 1968, with an 11-14 age range which it extended to Year 6 in 1981. For many years, the school fared well under performance measures and inspection regimes. However, a number of factors started to work against the 10-14 schools. The focus upon SATs assessments at 11 and the removal of SATs at 14 meant that the school was judged most heavily by its youngest year group. All around the county, the High schools changed to become 11-16 schools. The choice was to wait and do nothing or to take the initiative.

For a year, I watched, waited, listened and learned. Parts of the community were wary of change and were concerned by the potential upheaval that it would cause. We engaged with students, parents, staff and the community to find the best way forward. In the end, we applied the principle that no matter how difficult the task, we should always do the right things for the right reasons and so the change began.

We are a relatively small secondary school and we knew that students would benefit from staying with us for longer. We know our students and their families well and successful schools are always built upon strong relationships. Moving students



Manor High thrives from its multiculturalism in which we all respect and learn from each other

between schools at 10 and again at 14 was contrary to parental wishes and their desire for continuity and stability.

Changing cultures

The challenge was to build upon the great strengths of a school which was a quarter primary and three quarters secondary and create an 11–16 structure. We wanted to keep the enrichment, opportunities and extra-curricular activities our students had always enjoyed and to carry this through to 16.

We started by establishing our Core Values. After consultation with students, parents, governors and staff, we agreed that the four essential values of our school were to be excellence, inspiration, care and respect. Excellence was chosen because it represents our relentless pursuit of the highest standards. Inspiration is key to our curriculum and is at the heart of our recruitment of staff. Care is reflected in our charity work and our pastoral structures. Respect is based upon our appreciation of each other's similarities and differences in a multicultural school.

Our students are our greatest asset. They come with an expectation to

learn and thrive and they share our love of learning. Despite our location in an affluent area full of aspirational families, many of our students come from much further afield. Almost a half come from the city of Leicester, whose border is less than a mile from our school. In order to integrate our students quickly and to maximise the support of older students for younger ones, we introduced a House system. Through the division of the school into four equally-sized Houses, each became a smaller and more familiar unit for the students. We also introduced Vertical Tutoring which brought together students from every year into single groups. The older students support younger ones and in so doing, they develop their leadership skills. Through the school council, student leaders and the House Captains, there is a dialogue in which student views are influential.

One of our central aims is to develop the whole child. We work closely with three external organisations; Humanutopia to develop the potential of each child, Maximize to motivate and Pivotal to support the highest standards of conduct. Our students have also worked with PiXL (Partners in Excellence) and have achieved national recognition through their work with PiXL Edge

“We applied the principle that no matter how difficult the task, we should always do the right things for the right reasons”



Our students thrive in an environment driven by our Core Values

“We will continue to focus on the whole child through our close relationship with families and our work with leading national organisations”

and the LORIC leadership programme which develops leadership, organisation, resilience, initiative and communication. All of this work means that our students settle quickly, support each other and grow collectively through our pastoral programme. It means that they benefit further from the continuity of an 11-16 school.

Learning

Through the reduction of social barriers to learning, we are able to focus on the progress of students. Our curriculum is a traditional one which meets the needs of learners for the next stage of their education. Through close partnership work, we have devised an assessment system based upon the 1-9 GCSE gradings. It tracks students all the way from 11-16 with age appropriate grades or ‘bands’ for each year group. It is validated through benchmarking activities with other schools.

Communication

As a school, we used to keep quiet about our work; this led to misconceptions and a lack of engagement with the community. During the process of consultation and change, we resolved to promote ourselves openly at all times and to continue to respond

positively to feedback. We have had to work so hard at this that there is no room for complacency. We now tell people about what is going on in our school and they are amazed. We do this through social media, the website and our popular newsletters.

The future

The school has served the community well for almost 50 years. The focus on Key Stage 3 and the foundation for secondary education that our Year 6 students received were advantages. We will build upon the former and work hard with our primary partners to continue the latter. However, through resilience and a willingness to embrace change, we have put ourselves in a strong position. Finance and teacher shortages remain challenging for all schools but we are vigilant and have planned well. We keep a sharp focus on progress of learners at all times and frequently check our standards against the best schools locally and nationally. Shortly after leaving us, Manor High students went on to achieve exceptional GCSE results in 2016 Their Progress 8 score would have placed them 18th in the country. Our challenge is to maintain the excellence of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 and to build upon this to achieve great results at Key Stage 4.

For us, it is about more than this though. We will continue to focus on the whole child through our close relationship with families and our work with leading national organisations. As the best schools go through the new GCSE framework for the first time, we are well positioned to follow and to learn from them.

Our consultation to change age range was tough but ultimately successful. Our commitment to doing the ‘right things for the right reasons’ will continue to guide us.

New Mills School



Headteacher, Debbie McGloin
in assembly



The school grounds

When you hear that a school has been placed in Special Measures vivid pictures come to mind: corridor walls covered in graffiti and littered with refuse; beleaguered and fearful teachers struggling for control in chaotic classrooms; feral teens marauding unfettered whilst more nervous pupils cower in corners.

Our school – a Grade II listed building with beautiful gardens, a long-serving staff and a student body who continue to impress visitors through their good humour and courtesy – never bore any resemblance to this image. Yet, it desperately needed the wake-up call that Ofsted delivered in 2014 because the cosy slide towards comfortable does not engender a culture of high expectations. Nor does it deliver the best outcomes for young people.

The judgement shocked all staff, and as a new Headteacher arriving in a demoralised and rudderless school, it was hard to know where to start. Back then we did not have:

- » a vision statement
- » a robust system of performance management
- » a reliable management information system of student progress
- » a coherent policy about how staff reported attainment
- » any policy on marking and feedback
- » a senior leader in charge of continuing professional development (CPD) or teaching and learning
- » a school-wide approach to literacy or numeracy
- » a plan to deal with a growing budget deficit.

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Debbie McGloin
- » Number of students: 545
- » Number of teachers: 36
- » Special Educational Needs (SEN): 18%
- » Pupil Premium: 25%
- » School established: 1912

“The school’s self-evaluation processes reflect the Headteacher’s open, demanding and self-critical approach to improving the school”

Ofsted

All of these are in place now and leadership and management was recognised as Good in 2015.

As a new Head I did not assume everything needed overhauling. Before I took up the post formally, I asked many questions and listened not only to Ofsted, but to staff, students and parents and learnt from them what worked and what didn’t. Without attributing blame, all staff had to accept responsibility and step up to work together to change the culture and practice of our school.

Leadership is about unlocking potential

Most did, and I was quickly able to identify the talent in the school. Some staff were promoted into middle and senior leadership roles and played a key role in driving the school out of Special Measures. I have a very strong and talented senior leadership team consisting of three assistant Headteachers, recruited internally and externally, each with different strengths and destined for the higher echelons of leadership; all working in unison to drive the school forward.

However, in order to sustain and build on our improvements, we recognised that we needed to invest in our middle leaders. We have done this through external coaching, in-house training as

well as externally validated programmes such as the National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership (NPQML) and developing key staff as Specialist Leaders in Education. We are determined to invest heavily in the development of all our staff, encouraging and supporting colleagues at whatever stage of their career to maximise their skills and deepen their expertise. Perhaps inevitably, some staff found the differing focus and stretching expectations meant that the school was no longer for them. Now, over 40% of our teaching staff are new recruits and we are moving forward with a strong balance of fresh skills and insight boosted by long-serving experience that fuels our journey.

Regular professional dialogue celebrates, supports and challenges

Alongside getting the right people in the right role, our attention turned to systems and structures. Previously, some teachers worked hard to secure good outcomes for their students, but without central systems or support, their impact was, at best, limited.

We quickly established a self-evaluation framework and quality assurance activity calendar that clarifies roles and responsibilities at all levels throughout the year. Regular meetings ensure dialogue that both supports and challenges and this liaison is complemented by our re-evaluation of the appraisal process, ensuring that this was fairly linked to performance-related pay and prioritised the development of teaching and learning.

Our CPD programme is driven by our own staff carrying out Action Research Projects on key school priorities and sharing their practice with colleagues. Engagement with the constantly-changing face of education and utilising that knowledge in the classroom to ensure stretch and

GCSE English lesson



challenge for all is manifest in our improving outcomes. All teaching staff meet every week for a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Briefing ensuring we never forget why we are here and what we are working towards.

Our progress 8 measure has improved from -0.11 in 2015 to 0.07 in 2016

We don't just concentrate on the exchange of information between staff, leaders and governors. We turn the same sharp focus on our students. The management information system I inherited was not fit for purpose and there was no systematic tracking and monitoring of student progress. Our teachers did not have easy access to student data to allow them to plan effectively, monitor progress and deliver timely intervention for those falling behind. Today we have a very sophisticated process which is standardised across every year group enabling senior and middle leaders to analyse data and identify individuals and groups of students who are underachieving. This knowledge is used to engage young people in meaningful Knowledge, Attitude, Skills and Habits (KASH) conversations about their attitudes to learning and support them to improve through a wide-ranging programme of individualised intervention. From tweaking small details, such as a change in the seating plan, to comprehensive support, such as following an alternative curriculum, we pinpoint the right provision for each child to maximise their outcomes.

We aim to empower everyone to be the best that they can be, optimising their future success, wellbeing and contribution to society

To make this reality and not an empty sound-bite, we drive relentlessly for staff and students no longer to settle for mediocrity. To change the culture



GCSE results day; that's what looking at six Levels of progress feels like

and make doing 'just enough' a thing of the past, we have placed character education and attitudes to learning at the heart of our school.

New Mills School does not settle for mediocrity

We have introduced growth mindset characteristics into our reporting cycle and our tutorial programme facilitates and underpins this. Students are rewarded for demonstrating the traits of responsibility, reflection and resilience in the same way they are for educational achievement.

We look for evidence of this every day; and we see it. From students' responses to their teachers' feedback in their well-presented exercise books, to the pride they take in their uniform or the dwindling numbers of pupils in late detention, incrementally and steadily our school is improving.

“97% of students agree their teachers expect them to work hard and do their best”

» THIS YEAR'S HIGHLIGHTS

- » P8 Overall improved by **0.18** between 2015 and 2016
- » P8 English improved by **0.47** between 2015 and 2016 and in the top 10% nationally
- » P8 maths improved by **0.25** between 2015 and 2016
- » Progress of the more able disadvantaged students in the **top 10%** nationally for English
- » Progress of the more able students in the **top 1%** nationally for English

Newbridge High School



Stewart Goacher, Headteacher



Newbridge High School,
Coalville, Leicestershire

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Stewart Goacher
- » Location: Coalville, Leicestershire
- » Newbridge High School Single Academy Trust for students aged 11–14
- » Motto: Aim High Achieve More
- » Students on roll: 502
- » Pupil Premium: 26%
- » Students with Special Educational Needs: 22%
- » Full-time equivalent teachers: 22.5
- » Founder member of Apollo Partnership Trust due to be formed in Autumn 2017

Two years ago, Ofsted released a paper entitled *Key Stage 3: The Wasted Years?* I can see their point. The emphasis in many schools is on the changing GCSE specifications, progress 8 and cramming for those all-important exams. In some schools, Key Stage 3 is neglected and there is an almost indecent rush to start Key Stage 4 as early as possible. At Newbridge, we focus on Key Stage 3 and provide for the needs of the early adolescent.

Looking both ways at once

The introduction of the new national curriculum in 2013, in which levels of attainment are no longer clearly defined, has forced us to be really explicit about the steps our students must take to achieve academic success. The ACE Partnership, a loose grouping of six secondary schools in the Ashby and Coalville area, was the ideal vehicle to create a new curriculum and assessment system with built-in external accountability and high expectations of progress.

We have defined five pathways and have made our expectations clear to our students and their parents. If they stay on their pathway, they are doing well, as our expectations are ambitious; if they drop below we have to work together to get them back on track; if they go above, we celebrate their success. Exams at the end of each year back up the ongoing teacher assessment that helps students become active learners, involved in their own progress, always looking forward.

Attainment colour	Attainment descriptor	Heading for a GCSE grade of...
	Highest	9,8,7
	Exceeding	6
	Secure	5
	Growing	4,3
	Foundation	2,1

At the same time we have had to take account of the higher expectations at Key Stage 2. We have worked with primary colleagues to ensure that we tie in with the new primary curriculum, and get the information so that our Year 7s hit the ground running.

It seems to be working. This year, 73% of Year 9 students achieved a secure pathway in maths and 80% in English, on track to good GCSE grades.

An important element of looking two ways at once is literacy. Led by a combination of our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator and English Subject Leader, we run a whole school reading programme, with specific interventions for those who need to develop the higher order skills required at Key Stage 4.

Raising aspirations

Coalville is an ex-mining area, often seen as the poor relation of the more affluent, neighbouring town of Ashby. It is almost a cliché to hear it described as low in aspirations. Yet I have never heard any parent say that they didn't want the best for their child. Almost 90% of our parents buy into our iPad leasing scheme, which provides a subsidised iPad for students to use in and out of school. Digital learning motivates our learners and expands horizons. The school is genuinely comprehensive, with a wide social mix and so we show off our achievers (at any level of ability) as role models for others through

their Book of Excellence and through valuing and celebrating work in the students' Progress File. We also invite positive role models into school.

One of the most effective ways of raising aspirations is through sport. The school boasts exceptional facilities for its size and encourages its local community to make use of them: every evening and at weekends, the 3G artificial turf pitch and Sports Hall are packed with community groups. Our next venture is to try to secure the funding for an athletics track.

Aiming High and Achieving More in sport gives our students the confidence to try and the resilience to keep going and succeed in all areas of school life.

“This year, 73% of Year 9 students achieved a secure pathway in maths and 80% in English”

Year 7 students working to achieve their target pathway





The joy of digital learning!
Using iPads, subsidised
by the school



Social and emotional
learning at lunchtime

» KEY PARTNERS

- » Apollo Partnership Trust
- » Ashby and Coalville Educational Partnership (ACE)
- » Coalville Family of Schools
- » Forest Way Teaching School Alliance
- » Leicestershire Academies Group

“We believe we have struck the right balance between academic rigour and catering for the whole child”

The whole child

There are so many pressures on young people; they must do well and at the same time be accepted socially but at the age of 11 and 12, they still need to be children.

We have done a lot in the past year to develop our lunchtime provision. We have built an adventure playground, organised more sporting activities and refurbished the library to cater for all needs and interests.

In addition, we take our pastoral provision very seriously. Our pastoral managers and tutors know their groups well. Friends will fall out, some will occasionally bully, others will move quickly to anger; these things are to be expected with young adolescents. We recognise that helping children to learn from their actions and alter their social behaviour is a key part of growing up, and a key part of our aim to develop the whole child.

Our safeguarding practice was particularly praised by Ofsted and the e-safety section of our website underlines the fact that caring for the whole child is no longer just limited to the school core hours but

covers the world of social media too. Many young adolescents are poorly prepared to cope in an online world fraught with dangers and where the rules seem to be different to normal social interaction.

The future

We are very proud of our school, and of the achievements of our students. However, a small secondary school is not sustainable in the current financial climate. We are therefore setting up Apollo Multi Academy Trust with local partner schools. This is an exciting time and whatever direction this takes us we will continue to champion the needs of the Key Stage 3 child and of the community which we serve.

We believe we have struck the right balance between academic rigour and catering for the whole child at the age that they are now. They flourish under our care and leave ready to embark on the next stage of their education. This is achieved by the hard work and dedication of all: students, staff, parents, outside agencies and the community as a whole. I am rightly proud to head this academy and look forward to an interesting and challenging future.

Northampton School for Girls



Becky West and students from Year 9



Students are confident and caring

It is two pm on a Thursday afternoon in The Clare Room of Northampton School for Girls. Jenny has just returned from her first session at a working stable that offers therapeutic behaviour sessions for teenagers. Jenny has never ridden a horse before. In fact, Jenny has rarely been beyond her housing estate in Northampton. Her life is punctuated by brief and frightening visits to her father in prison and fraught home visits from social services.

Before being taken under the wing of Becky, the learning mentor in the Clare Room – a nurture room at the heart of the school – Jenny's prospects were poor. Now though, she has a chance of not only achieving the qualifications needed for a head start but, more importantly, social and emotional skills needed to navigate the world with confidence.

Jenny is just one of the many girls who have benefited from an approach which prioritises self-esteem, motivation and mental health. With an Outstanding rating from Ofsted, the school prioritises the life chances of children from disadvantaged families, who make up 21% of the school population. This focus on care stems from the ethos of the school: respect for self, respect for others and respect for learning.

During a time of great change in the educational landscape, Northampton School for Girls has remained focused on its ethos and culture. Parents choose it for this reason; they know their daughters will be nurtured and encouraged in a climate of care and compassion. Each year, more than 800 applications are made for 270 student places – an indication of the popularity of the school's approach.

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Julia Harley
- » On roll: 1,700
- » Disadvantaged: 21%
- » English as an additional language: 25%
- » Minority ethnic groups: 41%
- » Ofsted rating: Outstanding

“You truly value your children; you look beyond their issues to know them as people – it’s no wonder they want to learn”

Sally-Anne Perkins,
Northamptonshire
County Council.

Not only do these parents want a safe, single-gender environment for their daughter, they also want a school where take-up of subjects such as physics, maths, sport and technology is high. The ethos of the school: respect for self, respect for others and respect for learning.

The personalised approach

Despite being the largest secondary school in the county, individual needs are prioritised. Personalising education for children is not easy; it is resource-heavy and requires a great deal of expertise, goodwill and dedication from staff. Northampton School for Girls prides itself on recruiting and retaining the best teachers and support staff who are committed to this approach.

Crucially, staff recognise that children need to feel safe before they can learn, especially if they come from disadvantaged families. The school has three safe spaces for children: The Clare Room for students aged 11 to 13; The Pink Room for students aged 14 to 16; and The Blue Lagoon for students with specific special educational needs.

In addition to the safe and nurturing spaces, Becky and the inclusion

team create personalised timetables for children who are at risk of underachieving or disengaging. With more than 40% of children coming from minority ethnic groups and one in four having English as a second or additional language, this is a very important part of the school’s work.

Relationships

Speak to anyone at Northampton School for Girls about the secret of their success and they will say it is relationships which are valued above all else; they are the key to great exam results, happy children and staff retention. Partner agencies, such as the police and social services, comment regularly on the power of the relationships they see between staff and students. Sally-Anne Perkins of Northamptonshire County Council says ‘You truly value your children; you look beyond their issues to know them as people – it’s no wonder they want to learn’.

The calm, polite and orderly climate of the school is a testament to the strength of these relationships. Students conduct themselves respectfully because the ethos creates that expectation; there are no strict rules or harsh punishments but behaviour is exemplary.

All students are supported to achieve their best



Students feel happy and safe





Students thrive in a calm, polite and orderly environment

The organisation of the school

State education in Northampton was restructured in 2008 from a three-tier system of primary, middle and upper schools, to just primary and secondary. When this happened, Northampton School for Girls expanded by 540 students, so needed to be completely rebuilt. Supported by the Gulbenkian Foundation, an international charity dedicated to improving children's wellbeing, the expansion was guided by 'human scale principles.' This meant the school, now with 1700 students, could be organised into smaller learning communities, of which there are three: Oak, Elm and Sixth Form. Each community is like a family, ensuring that each girl is known by her name and encouraged to become a confident, respectful, caring young woman.

Schools in Northamptonshire, a county which has been identified as Underachieving by Ofsted, are facing a time of unprecedented change and challenge. Despite this pressure, Northampton's headteachers are determined to work together to increase the life chances for children in a town where in 2016, only half of

sixteen year olds passed GCSE English and mathematics. The Headteacher of Northampton School for Girls, Mrs Julia Harley, says she is proud to be involved in a town-wide partnership to raise standards and believes that the starting point is the ethos: 'Create a safe and respectful culture where children are valued as individuals and they will flourish, personally and academically.' The ethos acts as an anchor for decisions about the future and is viewed by governors, the community and by partner services as the school's unique and special quality.

It is this special quality that allows a child like Jenny, whose background is one of neglect, to experience the healing benefits of caring for, managing and riding horses. It is the reason why Jenny, smelling distinctly of the stables, is leaping around The Clare Room, enthused and passionate on a Thursday afternoon. Jenny's academic education is her way out of poverty and could change her life, but before she can engage in learning, she needs to feel loved, trusted and special – which is what Northampton School for Girls does best.

“Create a safe and respectful culture where children are valued as individuals and they will flourish, personally and academically”

Sir Jonathan North Community College



The college receives 'World Class School' recognition'

We have been on a five year journey which has seen Ofsted rate us as Good then Outstanding. On top of that, in December 2017, we were the first state school in Leicestershire, and one of only seventeen non selective state schools nationally, to receive the World Class Schools Quality Mark.

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher:
Mrs Alison Merrills
- » Type: Girls' State
Comprehensive School
- » Location: Leicester
- » Number on roll: 1250
- » Number of teachers: 74
- » Number of support staff: 60
- » Free School Meals: 31.3%
- » Students for whom English
is not their first language:
38.2%
- » Number of SEND students:
10.5%

Our GCSE English results have put us in the top 10% of schools nationally for a number of years, and last year, we were in the top 6%. We were anxious to cascade this success throughout the school. This is being achieved through whole-staff training, enrichment opportunities, and extended engagement with the wider community and industry professionals.

We pride ourselves on educating the whole student and our successes in recent years demonstrate our commitment to preparing girls to become confident, articulate and aspirational young women by the time they leave us. Numerous opportunities are provided for students to take part in a wide variety of enrichment activities in order to develop the skills they are gaining in lessons; our approach to Literacy Across the Curriculum has always been to extend these skills beyond the classroom. We are now reaping the rewards of a relentless and creative approach to skilling young women for life beyond school which has led to local, regional and national recognition of our students' talents.

Our journey began back in 2012 when embedding literacy across the curriculum became a whole school focus as more GCSE subjects were requiring a spelling, punctuation and grammar mark.

We gave our Advanced Skills English teacher a brief to skill, enthuse and support all staff in delivering literacy as part of their normal teaching practice. For the first three years, there was a clear focus each year: Reading, Writing and Speaking. The aim was to raise achievement through by teaching reading, writing and communication strategies. This whole school training was then supplemented by a number of supporting strategies such as making literacy resources available on every computer desktop, and 30 minute skills sessions covering literacy basics. The AST worked with specific subject areas to train staff to model the writing process confidently and independently. This year, we received the Heritage Schools Award, following previous success in the historically-themed Young Writer and Young Investigator of the Year competition. These achievements reflect our determination to make sure all staff, whatever their specialism, take responsibility for promoting literacy.

Underpinning everything we do is a belief that our job is to educate the whole child, so we were keen to

provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for developing their own literacy skills whilst enabling others to do so. We began training reading buddies and Literacy Leaders. The Literacy Leaders initiative trains Year 9 (13-14 year olds) students in the delivery of literacy strategies to Year 7 students in Humanities, form time, and in English. They are charged with raising the profile of literacy around the college and they attend the Year 6 transition evening to talk to parents. At the end of the course, they achieve certificates from the Sports Council UK. Reading Buddies in Years 9 and 10 are trained to work with younger students to support their reading, which has proved to be mutually beneficial:

‘I like Reading Buddies as I get to see the progress the students make over a period of time. Their confidence in reading out loud grows week after week as well as their reading ability.’

‘I like it because it’s helpful and it helps me with the words. My tutor will help me by explaining what they mean or they will show me.’

“We were keen to provide opportunities for students to take responsibility for developing their own literacy skills whilst enabling others to do so”

Drama students take part in the Leicester Comedy Festival





Peer-to-peer reading support



Year 11 celebrate successful GCSE results

“We have developed a culture of aspiration which seeks to give students a range of engaging, challenging and creative opportunities to shine”

We have developed a culture of aspiration which seeks to give students a range of engaging, challenging and creative opportunities to shine. In addition to work carried out in the classroom, we are keen for staff to provide enrichment opportunities for students to showcase their talents and develop new ones. This year alone we have celebrated students who have won competitions for writing short stories, monologues and poems, designing book covers, and creating a new Hogwarts' professor! In March 2017 four of our students were elected to the Leicester Youth Parliament. This enables them to represent the views of young people in this area, speaking confidently and articulately on their behalf. For two years running, we won Gold Best School in the Leicester Schools Court Competition, this was alongside individual awards to students for the prestigious Best Advocate Award and Best Court Official. Behind all of these achievements lies, the hard work, dedication and motivation from our staff.

Each year, employers come into school to give all Year 10 students a mock interview, and are blown away by the enthusiasm, ambition and commitment of the girls. This year, feedback included:

‘Your students are so ambitious; every single one of them had a dream career in mind and all seemed passionate about reaching their goals.’

This wider student success demonstrates our commitment to promoting literacy skills in broad, creative and contextual ways which has helped us to move from Good to Outstanding. Following the three year programme, a key focus has been to embed good practice across the college, and develop additional strategies to respond to a changing cohort. We have employed a specialist teacher to work with students and parents who are new to English. The co-ordinator has provided extensive and regular training for all staff on how to meet the needs of students who are new to English to ensure we promote full inclusion to support language acquisition.

Our journey is far from over, but as we seek to build on past successes our aim is to ensure many more students are able to echo the words of one of our Year 10 girls: ‘I have learned many significant skills which I know will be a great asset to me in the future. I hope that all my fellow students will feel as proud as I am to call our college ‘World Class’.

St John Fisher Catholic High School

The team of student Learning Leaders model excellent learning habits for others



Sean Hayes, Headteacher

It takes a lot of effort by a lot of people over a lot of time to create a Good school. One person can have a dramatic initial impact but they need to engage others to build an effective team. This is what happened at St John Fisher Catholic High School over a five-year period resulting in a school that is now consistently performing well and was in the top 10% nationally for GCSE results in 2016.

The school serves a very challenging community. Almost two-thirds of students do not have English as their first language and the majority of these speak their first language at home. Many of them arrived in the country after the start of formal education, and several each year join the school having just arrived in the country with little or no English. It can often be the case that the child learns English more quickly than the parent and so interpreters are required for meetings. There is, consequently, a very large mix of ethnicities in the school and many different religions: around half the students are Catholic and about a fifth are Muslim. The student population includes many students from deprived parts of the city. Pastoral care, induction and support for those with English as an additional language are therefore high priorities for the school.

The journey started in 2008 when the school went into Special Measures. An Interim Executive Board was appointed which in turn appointed an Executive Headteacher, Sean Hayes. The journey began. Five terms later the school was taken out of Special Measures, a new governing body was installed and Sean Hayes had become the permanent Headteacher. A significant milestone on this journey was the 2013 inspection which judged the school to be Good in all areas. This was followed a month later by the diocesan inspection which judged the school to be Outstanding.

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Sean Hayes
- » Location: Peterborough
- » 50 teachers and 18 teaching assistants
- » Students on roll: 710
- » Age range: 11–18
- » 78% from minority ethnic groups
- » 68% of students' first language is not English, representing 45 languages.

“Clearly defined structures and processes were seen as fundamental to making the school run smoothly and effectively”

How did this happen? To begin with, once effective governance was in place, the senior leadership team was restructured with one person given delegated responsibility for each of the key aspects of education: teaching and safeguarding, outcomes, curriculum, behaviour and attendance, finance and premises. Middle leadership was then structured around a faculty model with four core faculties (RE, English, maths, and science) and four foundation faculties (humanities, expressive arts, languages and technology). The eight Heads of Faculty assumed responsibility for their subjects but collectively ensured consistency of delivery and standards.

Clearly-defined structures and processes were seen as fundamental to making the school run smoothly and effectively. The curriculum was redesigned around a new four-period day with fewer lessons, each of 75 minutes, allowing more time to be spent on a topic and less movement around the site. In addition, students were placed into mixed-age forms within a new house structure, the four houses being named after key places in John Fisher's life: Beverley, Cambridge, Rochester and Westminster.

From the start of this journey, parents were kept informed of progress and other news via a weekly newsletter. Following feedback, the school moved to having fewer parents' evenings but running each one for longer, thus allowing parents to plan around work commitments and to see the teachers of more than one of their children at the same event.

Structural changes alone do not improve outcomes for students and so a focus on the quality of teaching was paramount from the outset. This became the responsibility of the Deputy Headteacher in the new structure. A routine of checking every teacher's performance each term was introduced alongside a comprehensive professional development programme with additional support where required. The use of the available training time was optimised to provide sessions throughout the year for teachers to work in trios on developing their practice. Effective systems for appraisal run in tandem with this to ensure that support can be targeted to where it is needed and outstanding teachers can be recognised and rewarded.

The school's Army Cadet Corps parading on Remembrance Day



Participation in the Arts is seen as an essential part of a rounded education



Over time there has been a steady improvement in outcomes, with a new high being reached in 2016 when the Progress 8 measure placed the school in the top 10% nationally. Although this was largely down to improvements in teaching, it also reflected the school focusing on promoting an eagerness to learn. Assemblies, newsletters, and subject Focus Days all made achievement and the enjoyment of learning priorities, along with a continually-evolving system for rewarding and celebrating success. This has been heavily influenced by students themselves via their house councils.

The progress students make is now monitored at least termly, with a report being sent home each time. Every student has an individual academic tutoring interview with their form tutor after each assessment point, at which personal targets are reviewed and new ones set.

Exam results alone do not prepare students to be effective citizens of tomorrow. The students at St John Fisher come from a very wide range of ethnicities and faiths, although around half are Catholic. This is used as a basis for celebrating the positive aspects of living and working in a multi-cultural community and informs the gospel values that underpin everything the school does. Students learn to respect others, show tolerance and understanding, and develop an understanding of decency and democracy through their own experience as they travel through the school. Leadership skills are developed from the outset and opportunities to lead are not restricted to older students. Elections are held for positions on house and school councils, students are able to be reading buddies and learning leaders, and sixth form students are employed as lunchtime supervisors.



There are no spectators on Sports Day: everyone takes part!

Throughout the journey the school has been outward looking, seeking out external links and opportunities to learn from the work of others. At the beginning this meant being part of the hugely successful National Challenge programme and this evolved into working with Future Leaders and Teach First, and the Partners in Excellence (PiXL) group. The school is also involved in both local and regional training of new recruits to the profession. The school was also one of the pilot group that established the city's school-to-school network for school improvement work.

All schools face challenges and St John Fisher is not immune to these. Continual change from central government, cuts to funding, student turnover, the national recruitment crisis – all need to be addressed. Fortunately St John Fisher is now in a strong position to deal with each issue as it arises.

So how has the school done this and how does it remain optimistic in these challenging times? The answer is that it continues to play to its strengths: being inclusive, celebrating diversity, caring for every person and providing for the needs of all. It does this by staying true to its core values.

“Leadership skills are developed from the outset and opportunities to lead are not restricted to older students”

Creative Education Trust



Holly Hartley, Principal of Thistley Hough Academy, Stoke-on-Trent



Weavers Academy, Wellingborough

Creative Education Trust (CET) has dramatically improved its most intractable schools without sacrificing the integration of academic knowledge and skills with creativity. Creative Education Trust schools do not define creativity by the Arts alone, but also as the ability to connect different areas of knowledge and turn these connections into new ideas.

REPORT CARD

- » Chief Executive: Marc Jordan
- » Chair: David Anderson
- » Date established: 2011
- » Secondary schools: 7
- » Primary schools: 5
- » Location of schools: Stoke-on-Trent, Rugeley, Tamworth, Bedworth (Coventry), Northampton, Wellingborough, Great Yarmouth
- » Number of pupils/students: 8,400
- » Number of staff: 900

Weavers Academy, in the Northamptonshire town of Wellingborough, a former centre of the now almost defunct British shoe-making industry, joined CET in 2013 with a long history of underachievement, and had been in and out of the Special Measures Ofsted category for many years. The housing estate it serves, Queensway, is among the UK's most disadvantaged communities. A culture of low aspiration and a curriculum without ambition made the recruitment and retention of staff difficult: from 2011–15 Weavers had four principals in as many years. The most recent of these, Vivien Swaida, took over in 2015, an outstanding leader who sees herself as none other than the 'Head of Teaching'.

A new focus on pedagogy took hold: students were given constant feedback on their work and time to respond to it under their teachers' direction. Less syllabus content was covered, with the expectation of greater accuracy in the learning. Students and staff quickly became aware of a total intolerance of poor performance. In 2016 Weavers' key statistical measurement – 5 A*–C grades at GCSE including English and maths – shot up by over 30 percentage points. Meanwhile the Progress 8 score, representing the academic progress made by students between their entry to the school in year 7 and their GCSEs five years later, puts Weavers in the top 25% of schools in the country. Within a year of these results, Weavers Academy was judged by the Government's regulator Ofsted to be a good school in all categories of the inspection.



Year 7 students at Thistley Hough Academy presenting 3D models created in a workshop with designer Ab Rogers

Weavers Academy

Wellingborough, Northants

5 A*–CEM 2015	26%
5 A*–CEM 2016	59%
Progress 8 score	+0.28

Thistley Hough Academy

Stoke-on-Trent

Progress score English	+0.36
Progress score maths	+0.18
Progress score open	+0.54
Progress 8 (overall score)	+0.24

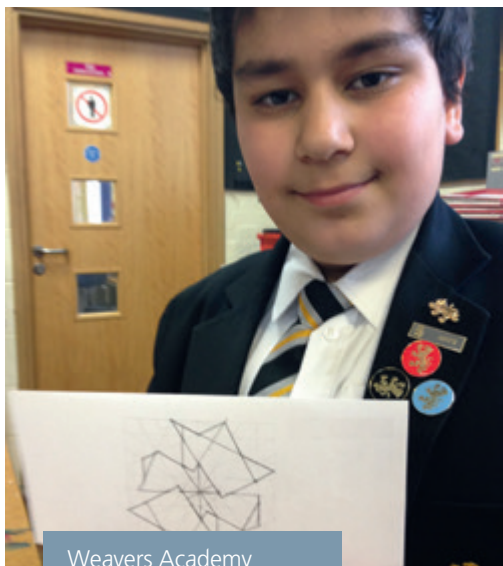
Since it opened as a high-performing girls' grammar school in 1938, Thistley Hough Academy has occupied a commanding hilltop position in Penkhull village within the city of Stoke-on-Trent. After it became a mixed comprehensive school in the 1970s, it rapidly declined into poor performance with shrinking student numbers. Its facilities fell into a progressively more squalid state of repair, while the behaviour of students reflected all the tensions of an increasingly diverse, post-industrial community. By the time CET took it on in 2013, Thistley Hough had been in Special Measures twice in ten years, marked out as one of the poorest-performing schools in the country, under inconsistent leadership and constant changes of regime. Today, an outstandingly strong leader, Holly Hartley, supported by CET, combines modern methods with symbols of tradition in a state-of-the-art building. Oak display boards for academic achievement, a scholars' programme, a Latin after-school club and an awards evening at which academic gowns are worn, all promote education as the best route to social mobility in a context that has lacked

ambition and prosperity since its industrial decline and where many immigrant families, including refugees and asylum seekers, do not have English as their first language. While compassionate and inclusive, Thistley Hough maintains zero tolerance towards poor behaviour. Committed staff share the Principal's unswerving moral compass and enthusiasm for teaching. Four years after joining CET, the most improved school in Stoke-on-Trent has a Progress 8 score that places it in the top 25% nationwide for all groups, including those with disadvantaged students; and in April 2017 Ofsted rated Thistley Hough Academy as good across all categories.

CET was founded in 2011 by leading figures in education and the creative industries. They include former professor of education, Dr William Richardson, now Chair of HMC, the independent schools' association of Heads, and Michael Dickson, former Chairman of the structural engineering firm BuroHappold.

David Anderson, Chair, brings to the CET a distinguished background in

“Weavers and Thistley Hough are creative schools: each uses imaginative methods for linking knowledge across subject boundaries, fostering personal development and resilience, and developing practical skills that prepare students for their transition to adult life”



Weavers Academy students in creative workshops on Islamic pattern design and social enterprise led by Alex Bellos and the Citizenship Foundation respectively



“The academic arts and the sciences, practical subjects and life skills all require creativity, and creativity is valued highly by employers”

corporate finance and the leadership of charities, while the career of Marc Jordan, Chief Executive, has included senior roles in prominent publishing and cultural enterprises. The directors believe that a rewarding educational experience and the highest possible qualifications are the best way to ensure social mobility for young people. Creative Education Trust is now a multi-academy trust with seven secondary and five primary schools in the Midlands and East Anglia.

Creative Education Trust's rigorous approach to the improvement of teaching and learning complements an educational vision that harnesses creativity to knowledge and skills. Creative Education Trust defines creativity as the ability to find connections between the things we know and turn these connections into new ideas and action. The academic arts and the sciences, practical subjects and life skills all need this creativity, and creativity is valued highly by employers. In Creative Education Trust's definition of creativity – the ability to connect knowledge to form new ideas – Weavers and Thistley Hough are outstandingly creative schools: each uses imaginative methods for linking knowledge across subject boundaries, fostering personal development and resilience and

developing practical skills that prepare students for their transition to adult life.

CET remodelled local governance in these two schools by introducing a Rapid Improvement Board of educational professionals at Weavers to focus on performance and standards, and by strengthening that same focus in Thistley Hough's local governing body under the new chairmanship of an expert in educational management. These boards have made the professional challenge to teachers and staff more consistent, whilst retaining the crucial links with the local community that a Local governing body represents.

A small team of executive directors gives professional support to the schools in educational improvement and standards, curriculum design, enrichment, financial management, marketing and communications, estates management and human resources. Each of these directors is as likely to be found in the schools as they are in London office of CET.

Creative Education Trust is led by a board of non-executive directors: passionate, successful, philanthropically-minded individuals chosen for their knowledge of business, law, the creative industries and, of course, education at all levels.

Wolverhampton Girls' High School



An outstanding selective grammar school for girls



Trudi Young, Headteacher

The secondary school of Rachael Heyhoe-Flint, the female cricketing trailblazer, we embody female empowerment in all we do. Central to our philosophy is a drive to embed confidence and self belief in our students to go into the world, overcome any obstacles and achieve whatever it is they put their mind to.

An outstanding selective grammar school for girls, Wolverhampton Girls' High School is located in the heart of the West Midlands, attracting highly-able girls from Wolverhampton and beyond. We are a high-achieving school with the students securing fantastic examination results at GCSE and A Level. From very high starting points, excellent progress and outcomes, puts the school in the top 25% nationally. At the most recent Ofsted inspection in 2009 we were graded Outstanding in every category. I became Headteacher in 2012 and was tasked with maintaining the school's Outstanding status and performance.

Academic excellence is a key feature of life at Girls' High, with all working towards achieving their personal best. The relentless focus on supporting our girls to achieve and reviewing and refining our provision in order to achieve this ensures that the students leave with exceptional outcomes. With a 2016 Progress 8 score of 0.41, 81% of all GCSE entries at A*-B and 78% of A Level entries at A*-B, our girls leave as confident independent-minded young women with the skills they need for future success.

These exceptional outcomes are achieved through inspirational teaching and the focused learning environments. Across the school, there is a buzz of excitement, with subjects coming alive and the students exhibiting a real thirst for learning.

REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Trudi Young
- » Location: Wolverhampton
- » Number on roll: 858
- » Pupil Premium: 64
- » Ethnic breakdown: 45% White British and 32% Indian
- » Number of teaching staff: 58



Developing happy, confident and resilient young women

“There’s a lot going on at this school. Enrichment, that buzz word, is plentiful here”
Good Schools Guide

With an increasing drive towards celebrating personal best, we encourage students to realise their potential. This develops a love of lifelong learning as students discover passions and interests that will shape their future. We encourage a questioning mind and develop skills for all that lies ahead.

Ludus Supra Praemium, The game Before the Prize is our school motto. As students progress through their time with us, they value immensely the many opportunities that they have to enjoy the game. Indeed this emphasises the school’s real focus on developing happy, confident

and resilient young women. Whilst academic excellence is at the heart of our provision, the importance of nurturing softer skills is central to all that we do.

Our House System forms the foundations on which our strong community is built, providing endless opportunities for leadership, personal development and friendship bonds. Fierce loyalty and rivalry infiltrates the House System at Wolverhampton Girls’ High School.

The vibrancy of the school environment is most evident at one of our regular events. With girls competing in the annual Sports Day for their House on the track, in the field or in the traditional welly wanging (throwing !!!) competition, camaraderie and determination are in abundance.

The annual House Arts competition, in which over half of our community participate, offers the chance for students to write, direct, choreograph, compose and direct. With elements of dance, music, drama and musical expertise this is a real chance to shine.

With sports competitions and House debating, alongside the House Winter Games, where students compete in football, netball, badminton, table tennis, a bake off, textiles competitions, public speaking, dance, spelling bees, quizzes and creative tasks, there really is something for everyone. Indeed it is these experiences that stay with the girls for years to come.

Wolverhampton Girls’ High School prides itself on being a close-knit family community. Our girls care deeply for each other, with strong bonds forming within and between year groups. A strong system of peer mentoring is in place with a focus on both pastoral and academic issues.

House Winter Games Competition



All of our girls are gifted in different ways, we aim to unlock those gifts and help them to flourish. Helping our girls to develop in the areas that they love is a central part of education at Girls' High. Our students are all individuals and, whether they be an avid sportswoman, a budding musician, at home on the stage, or all of the above, then there are endless opportunities to grow these skills. Whether a student loves to dance, paint, draw or debate, she will be supported to grow.

The students have also competed at local, regional and national level in competitions ranging from geography and chemistry quizzes to the national mathematic challenges to the Oxford and Cambridge Union Debating and the Bank of England Target 2.0 contest.

Competitive sports such as netball, hockey, football, rounders, and cricket, form a part of the timetabled curriculum. Alongside these are individual sports such as tennis, athletics and badminton. Whilst girls regularly perform exceptionally well at local, regional and national level through our school teams, we encourage students to engage and enjoy sport whatever their level of expertise.

Provision also includes access to our fitness studio, yoga sessions, mindfulness, and Judo, amongst others.

There is an endless array of opportunities with girls participating in choirs, orchestras, and bands and over 300 girls enjoying individual or group lessons. Student talents are showcased at the regular concerts and Soloist Concerts. Musical, dramatic and dance talents are also on display through the regular productions taking place. In recent years these have included, *Oliver*, *Annie*,



Fierce loyalty and rivalry infiltrates the house system

Bugsy Malone, *Alice in Wonderland*, and the *Wizard of Oz*.

Opportunities to travel add depth and breadth to knowledge and understanding and develop and widen cultural awareness. Students have enjoyed trips to Iceland, China, Russia, Madagascar, USA, France, Italy and Spain in the past two years.

In recent years the school has benefited from £8 million investment through the Building Schools for the Future programme and is part way through a further extension thanks to £2.3 million from the Education Funding Agency's Condition Improvement Fund. These developments mean that we have been able to increase the number of places in each year group from 108 to 145, offering more students the opportunity to join us.

In the words of our outgoing Head Girl, education at Wolverhampton Girls' High is not just about academic success, it is about growing up and developing skills for lifelong success. The focused learning environment with a strong community ethos transcending all that we do helps our girls to achieve their personal best.



There is an endless array of opportunities

“All of our girls are gifted in different ways. We aim to unlock those gifts and help them to flourish”

Review of Parliament

A snap election

On the 19th April 2017, having repeatedly insisted that she had no intention of calling a snap election, Prime Minister, Theresa May, sprung a complete surprise when she summoned the press to Downing Street to announce she would seek a Commons vote to go to the country on June 8th 2017.

The announcement, made as Parliament returned from its Easter break, had the force of a thunderclap in Westminster. Quite unexpectedly, MPs and parties were plunged into election mode.

The immediate effect was to turn what were now the two remaining Prime Minister's Question Times of the Parliament into de facto leader's debates – especially since it was made clear that Theresa May would not take part in the kind of televised debates held in the 2010 and 2015 elections.

The Prime Minister stated her case: 'There are three things that a country needs: a strong economy, strong defence and strong, stable leadership. That is what our plans for Brexit and our plans for a stronger Britain will deliver... The Right Hon. Member for Islington North (The Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn) would bankrupt our economy and weaken our defences and is simply not fit to lead.'

To Conservative jeers, Mr Corbyn counter-attacked: 'She says that it is about leadership, yet she refuses to defend her record in television debates. It is not hard to see why. The Prime Minister says that we have a stronger economy, yet she cannot explain why people's wages are lower today than they were 10 years ago or why more



Prime Minister Theresa May sought to strengthen her position before negotiations with the EU began

households are in debt. Six million people are earning less than the living wage, child poverty is up, and pensioner poverty is up.'

The two leaders traded more accusations with Theresa May warning that ordinary working people would face higher taxes and lost jobs under Labour while Mr Corbyn claimed the Prime Minister's priority was 'tax giveaways to the richest corporations while our children's schools are starved of the resources they need to educate our children for the future'.

Brexit emerged as one of the Prime Minister's main campaign themes: 'every vote for the Conservatives will make me stronger when I negotiate for Britain with the European Union. And every vote for the Conservatives will mean we can stick to our plan for a stronger Britain and take the right long-term decisions for a more secure future for this country.'

Later that afternoon, the Commons voted to call an early election, by 522 votes to 13.

The Queen's Speech



The Queen's Speech announced the government's legislative plan for the coming Parliament

What a difference. Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn's final Commons confrontation before the election had seen the Conservatives limbering up for a triumphal campaign which would culminate in the inevitable smashing of their Labour opponents. When the diminished, battered band of Conservative MPs reassembled, minus their parliamentary majority, for the state opening of Parliament on June 21st, they were chastened and uncertain, while euphoria gripped the occupants of the Labour benches.

When they came to speak in the traditional debate on an address thanking Her Majesty for the Queen's Speech – the new Government's legislative programme – the dynamic between the two main figures had changed completely. Mr Corbyn seemed a far more confident, assertive parliamentary performer, relishing the opportunity to throw back the taunts that had been hurled at him during the campaign.

A Government which had warned that he could only gain power in a 'coalition of chaos' with the SNP and the Lib Dems had been forced to negotiate for the support of the Northern Ireland Democratic Unionists ... and as the first

debate of this new Parliament began, that support had not been secured. Mr Corbyn could not resist the open goal. To triumphant Labour laughter he noted that 'the latest coalition may already be in some chaos'.

'Nothing could emphasise that chaos more than the Queen's Speech we have just heard: a threadbare legislative programme from a Government who have lost their majority and apparently run out of ideas altogether. This would be a thin legislative programme even if it was for one year, but for two years – two years? There is not enough in it to fill up one year.'

That was a reference to the Government's decision to declare a two-year Parliamentary Session – a procedural move intended to ensure ministers could push through vital Brexit legislation in time for the exit date in March 2019. Mr Corbyn mocked the Prime Minister for dropping a series of election promises that had not found favour with the voters: means-testing the winter fuel allowance and replacing the triple lock on pensions among others.

On Brexit, Mr Corbyn stuck to Labour's careful positioning in favour of a deal with the EU 'that puts jobs and the economy first'. He called for full access to the single market and a customs arrangement that provided Britain with the 'exact same benefits' as now. And in his final flourish he warned the Prime Minister that Labour were now 'not merely an Opposition; we are a Government in waiting, with a policy programme that enthused and engaged millions of people in this election, many for the first time in their political lives. We are ready to offer real strong and stable leadership in the interests of the many, not the few.'

Grenfell Tower

The fire that destroyed Grenfell Tower, a social housing block in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, seemed to some to crystallise the issues that had driven the 'Corbyn Surge' in the General Election just days earlier.

Accusations about the neglect of social housing tenants, chronic under-investment and official incompetence were flying, even while the pall of smoke still hovered over the capital and the horrific images of the blaze were replayed on TV.

So potent was the symbolism that it became intertwined in the debates on the post-election Queen's Speech - but the Government also committed to keep MPs informed about the aftermath, the efforts to identify casualties in the wreckage of the tower, to re-house and assist those who had lost their homes, and to set up a public inquiry.

So it was that the Communities Secretary, Sajid Javid, came to the Commons on July 3rd to announce £2.5 million had been distributed from the special £5 million fund set up to help the residents. Mr Javid said the public inquiry and the criminal investigation had to be allowed the space to follow the evidence wherever it took them, and everyone should be careful not to prejudice their work. Responding to the Labour MP, David Lammy, who had lost a family friend in the fire, he added that although it was for the judge to determine the scope of the inquiry, he expected it to be 'as broad and wide-ranging as possible'.

Mr Javid also dealt with the key issue of the authorities' inability to say exactly how many people had died: 'There



Tributes for the Grenfell victims came from across the country

has been much speculation about who was in Grenfell Tower on the night of the fire, and it is vital that we find out. The Director of Public Prosecutions has made it clear that there will be no prosecution of tenants ... who may have been illegally sub-letting their property, ... There may have been people living in flats that were illegally sub-let who had no idea about the true status of their tenancy. Their families want to know if they perished in the fire. These are their sons, their daughters, their brothers and their sisters. They need closure, and that is the least that they deserve.'

The Government was also taking urgent action to avoid another tragedy in buildings with architectural cladding similar to that which appeared to have been a factor in the Grenfell fire.

Last rites on the Brexit Bill



David Davis, Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union since July 2016

Back in March, when an election seemed a distant prospect, parliament's main focus was on the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Bill. This Bill, which would give Theresa May the authority to begin the UK's divorce from the European Union, was forced on the Government after a Supreme Court ruling that Parliamentary approval was required to begin the process.

Despite fears that the Bill could be watered down or even reshaped to reverse the Referendum verdict, it passed through the Commons

unscathed. All attempts to amend, or add, to its 136 words were voted down. Predictions of a major rebellion of up to 50 Conservative Remainers proved unfounded, and only a handful defied the party whip.

But when it moved on to the House of Lords, where there is no Government majority and a large concentration of pro-EU peers, the Bill was amended twice. One change guaranteed the rights of EU citizens living in the UK, and the second promised Parliament a 'meaningful vote' on the final Brexit deal. That meant the Bill had to return to the Commons because both Houses of Parliament must agree on the final wording of legislation.

After much debate, MPs rejected both Lords' amendments, the Bill was sent back for immediate consideration in the House of Lords, where David Davis came to watch his Junior Minister, Lord Bridges, call on Peers to drop their opposition. And while the Liberal Democrat, Lord Oates, did urge Peers to continue defying the Government, support for the amendment melted away, and the attempt to throw it back to MPs was once more rejected, as was the attempt to keep the 'meaningful vote'. The final form of the Bill was settled – and it was sent off for the Royal Assent, un-amended.

Article 50 is triggered

The passage of the European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act cleared the way for the Prime Minister to act on the Referendum verdict and formally trigger Britain's departure talks with the EU.

She was greeted by cheering Conservative MPs when she announced, on the 29th March, that the process had begun: 'A few minutes ago, in Brussels, the United Kingdom's permanent representative to the EU handed a



Theresa May meets
with European Council
President Donald Tusk in
Downing Street

letter to the President of the European Council on my behalf confirming the Government's decision to invoke Article 50 of the treaty on European Union. The Article 50 process is now under way and, in accordance with the wishes of the British people, the United Kingdom is leaving the European Union.'

She added that she wanted to build a close partnership with the EU: 'We want to continue to buy goods and services from the EU, and sell it ours ... Indeed, in an increasingly unstable world, we must continue to forge the closest possible security co-operation to keep our people safe. We face the same global threats from terrorism and extremism.'

Jeremy Corbyn warned against leaving without a trade agreement: 'the Prime Minister says that no deal is better than a bad deal, but the reality is that no deal is a bad deal.'

He said the debate had now moved on to what a post-Brexit Britain would be like: 'There are Conservatives who want to use Brexit to turn this country into a low-wage tax haven. Labour is determined to invest in a high-skill, high-tech, high-wage future ... Labour will not give this Government a free hand to use Brexit to attack rights and protections and to cut services, or to create a tax dodger's paradise.'

The eurosceptic Conservative, Jacob Rees-Mogg, quoted the Elizabethan hero Sir Francis Drake: "There must be a begynnyng of any great matter, but the conteneuing unto the end untill it be thoroughly ffynysshed yeldes the trew glory' ... I wish my Right Hon. Friend good luck and good fortune in her negotiations until she comes to true glory and is welcomed back to this House as a 21st century Gloriana.'

A terrorist attack on Parliament



The attack on Westminster was one of several terrorist attacks in the UK during the year

On the afternoon of March 22nd, as MPs were engaged in a routine vote of the Pensions Bill, a man drove his car into pedestrians just outside, killing two people and injuring dozens more, before stabbing to death a police officer who was guarding the gates to the Houses of Parliament, and he was then shot dead himself.

The sitting of the Commons was suspended and MPs were held in their Chamber for several hours, before being escorted away. When they returned the next day, they began with a minute of silence. Then the Speaker opened proceedings by expressing 'our heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims of this outrage. A police officer, PC Keith Palmer, was killed defending us, defending Parliament and defending parliamentary democracy.'

The Prime Minister was heard in silence as she updated MPs: 'Yesterday, an act of terrorism tried to silence our democracy, but today we meet as normal, as generations have done before us and as future generations will continue to do, to deliver a simple message: we are not afraid, and our resolve will never waver in the face of terrorism. We meet here, in the oldest of all Parliaments, because we know that democracy, and the values that it entails, will always prevail.'

She gave an account of the previous day's events and ended by declaring that the best response to terrorism was to act normally: 'As I speak, millions will be boarding trains and aeroplanes to travel to London and to see for themselves the greatest city on Earth. It is in these actions – millions of acts of normality – that we find the best response to terrorism: a response that denies our enemies their victory, that refuses to let them win, that shows we will never give in; a response driven by that same spirit that drove a husband and father to put himself between us and our attacker, and to pay the ultimate price; a response that says to the men and women who propagate this hate and evil, "You will not defeat us." Mr Speaker, let this be the message from this House and this nation today: our values will prevail.'

The Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, said people should not allow the voices of hatred to divide or cower them – adding that PC Keith Palmer had given his life defending the public and democracy.

Watching impassively in the crowd of MPs standing at the Bar of the House, in the area across the Chamber facing the

Speaker's Chair, was the Foreign Office Minister, Tobias Ellwood. He had tried to save PC Palmer's life by giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Many MPs took a moment to exchange a word with him as they passed or pat him on the arm. And many of those who spoke over the next hour praised his actions.

Tributes and thanks came from all the Party Leaders – the SNP's Westminster

Leader, Angus Robertson, the Liberal Democrats, Tim Farron, and the DUP's, Nigel Dodds.

The Conservative MP, James Cleverly, had served with PC Palmer in the army spoke movingly and implored the Prime Minister to 'posthumously recognise his gallantry and sacrifice formally.' Theresa May promised that she would.

President Trump

This year more than most, US politics had a bearing on our own. Not only were many MPs looking across the Atlantic for a trade deal and an enhancement of the 'special relationship', following the decision to leave the EU. But the American people themselves had managed to outdo the British electorate when it came to delivering the most surprising democratic decision of 2016.

As recently as January 2016, a small number of MPs had gathered in Westminster Hall to debate whether or not Donald Trump should be banned from entering the UK altogether. His comments about Muslims, among others, had led to an online petition for him to be considered a 'hate preacher' and therefore banned from British soil. Even those who supported the motion knew there was little chance of such a ban being implemented. But few would have suspected that, just 13 months later, Parliament would be discussing the appropriateness of a state visit from President Donald Trump.

One of the first acts of the new US President was to order a blanket ban on people from a list of Middle Eastern countries travelling to the US. In the Commons, the former Labour Leader, Ed Miliband, and the



Nadhim Zahawi MP strongly criticised the Trump administration's travel ban on certain Muslim countries

Conservative, Nadhim Zahawi, joined forces to ask the Speaker for an emergency debate – and it was held that day.

Mr Zahawi, born in Iraq to Kurdish parents, arrived in the UK as a nine-year-old refugee from Saddam Hussein's regime. He is now a British citizen, but because he was born in Iraq, he believed he came under the Trump ban.

He told MPs his place of birth already meant he had been required to go through an interview at the US embassy, to secure the right to travel to America, under rules imposed by President Obama. But the new restrictions were much tougher.

The US Government has since clarified that people with British passports will not be affected by the ban, whatever the country of their birth, but Mr Zahawi still thought the ban was 'wholly counterproductive'. He described how it was already being used by pro-Islamic State social media accounts as 'clear evidence that the USA is seeking to destroy Islam. They have even called it the "blessed ban"'.

Labour's Yvette Cooper, who chairs the Home Affairs Select Committee, was 'deeply worried' that the Government had already invited

the new President to make a state visit to Britain: 'It will look like an endorsement of a ban that is so morally wrong and that we should be standing against.'

The Conservative, Sir Simon Burns, disagreed: 'I think it is absolutely right that the British Government continue the work of the Prime Minister to build bridges with President Trump so that we can, through engagement, seek to persuade him and to minimise or reduce the danger of his more outrageous policies ... I believe that very little would be achieved by cancelling a state visit to which the invitation has already been extended and accepted.'

The emergency debate was on a formal motion that MPs had 'considered' Donald Trump's travel ban, so no call for a policy change was voted on.

President Trump meets with Theresa May in Washington D.C. following his surprise electoral victory



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