

Saffron Academy Trust, eNews, Issue 8



eNews

Issue 8, March 2023

Welcome to our Spring 2023 SAT newsletter



Dear Parents, Carers & Colleagues,

Some people ask me what 'Saffron Academy Trust' actually is and does. The answer is really very simple. Saffron Academy Trust (SAT) is all of the people who work for the Trust, all of the children and young people who are educated in it and the families they belong to. We are all SAT. What we do is our level best to give children and young people in our family of schools a great education in the broadest possible sense. A high quality education is characterised by strong teaching from professionals who are subject experts, a calm and supportive learning environment underpinned by

high expectations of student conduct, and many opportunities for our learners to develop talents and find out about the world beyond the classroom. It is why we work hard to recruit and train the best staff, we have clear and consistent rules about behaviour and our schools offer such a rich range of trips, visits and extra-curricular activities.

When a school decides to join SAT it goes on an improvement journey with us that brings about some changes for students and parents. Although we want all of our schools to keep their distinct local character and retain their Local Governing Bodies, we also want them to be ambitious and demand the best from the children in their care: the best **attendance** they can manage, their best **behaviour** as they grow from children to young adults, their best **efforts** in work, their best **performances** in examinations. Our parents play a crucial role in supporting us in this endeavour. All the evidence tells us that when parents work with a school the children flourish. The opposite is also true: no child flourishes when the adults who shape them do not work together.

It is always pleasing, therefore, when we see clear outcomes of our school improvement work. In November and December 2022 R A Butler Junior School, Alec Hunter Academy and Honywood School were inspected by Ofsted. Every one of those inspections demonstrated that the school has improved since it has been part of the SAT family. Both Alec Hunter and Honywood were graded comfortably Good in every category and RAB Juniors was judged strong enough to be considered potentially Outstanding at its next full inspection. The wonderful teams in those schools are to be congratulated as are all of the SAT Central Services and School Improvement colleagues who worked to support them.

Honywood School is an excellent example of a school that has flourished since being part of Saffron Academy Trust. Honywood joined SAT in 2019 and had suffered very disappointing examination results the year before. Four years later, with James Saunders at the helm, it is one of the best schools in the county, with excellent behaviour, a trend of improving performance and a talented and ambitious staff team. When Ofsted inspected the school in December they deliberated long and hard over whether the school had tipped into the 'Outstanding' category. How lucky the families in its catchment area are to have such a gem of a school on their doorstep. This edition of the newsletter shines a light on Honywood School.

I wish you a happy Easter holiday and a wonderful Spring.

Best wishes,

Caroline Derbyshire

CEO, Saffron Academy Trust

Message from the Trust's Chair, David Barrs



Having recently retired from teaching, the joy of working with young people was rekindled with a vengeance as I visited the schools in our Trust over recent months. Similarly, meeting Headteachers brought back many fond memories of what it was like to be in a position to make a difference to the lives of succeeding generations of young people as well as the working lives of teachers and professional support staff.

It was also a sad and stark reminder of the enormous and often debilitating challenges that schools are facing. I look back over my own career and know it has, to a greater or lesser extent, always been the case in the state sector. However, it seems that the challenges are of a different order at the moment: the cost of living issues facing the families of students and staff, inflated and unpredictable energy costs, the recruitment and retention of high quality staff and the recovery from the impact of the pandemic. Add in the ongoing challenges presented by social media, mental health and the lack of adequate funding and we begin to understand why it is so important to be in a position to work together with other schools.

The atmosphere and sense of purpose in each of the schools was positive and inspiring. Headteachers were rightly proud of what they were doing and were unanimous in their view that the collaborative nature of the Trust, and the opportunities to share good practice and to be supported through difficult moments by the Trust, were key elements in their ability to succeed. They are resourceful, resilient and reflective - attributes which can also be seen in the 1000 staff and 6,500 students in Saffron Academy Trust.

We know from our visits to the schools, the annual Fresh Eyes reviews and the work of our Primary and Secondary leads that each of our schools is on a continuous journey of improvement. This has been endorsed by recent Ofsted inspections of three of our schools, all of which were judged Good. The following quotes are a flavour of the feedback we received from Ofsted;

"Pupils enjoy learning. They are polite and respectful. They develop positive working relationships with staff. A strong sense of community exists within the school. Pupils feel and are safe".

"Pupils receive an education based on the school's ethos that is built on 'respectful relationships'. Pupils experience a rich curriculum that focuses on the world around them. Pupils are friendly and happy, and achieve well. They are exceptionally well prepared for the future".

"Staff morale is high. They feel valued by a leadership team that is mindful of their workload. They appreciate the training opportunities offered through the Trust. Staff, like many pupils, enjoy being part of Alec Hunter Academy"

Finally, I would like to thank all of the Trust's staff, students and families for making it possible for me to write such positive comments as this, despite the challenges we all face.

David Barrs

Chair, Saffron Academy Trust

SAT Central ICT Team



1 - Ben Johnson

ICT Hub Manager



2 - Dan Wright

ICT Hub Manager

The SAT ICT team, is focused on providing centralised management and development of the ICT systems in all the schools across the Trust. We work hard to ensure the systems are up to date and are protected against cyber threats, whilst continuing to meet the changing needs of each school.

The team is led by two ICT Hub Managers:

Ben Johnson is based at Saffron Walden County High School and supports the Trust's schools in Saffron Walden.

Dan Wright is based at Alec Hunter Academy and supports our schools in the Braintree area.

We work together on all aspects of ICT provision to ensure each school benefits equally in the support provided.

We have talented and knowledgeable technical staff based across all four secondary schools within the Trust. These colleagues also support our primary schools on a day to day basis and with weekly on-site visits.

We use our different strengths across the team to best deploy our resources and knowledge, enabling us to support each school's individual needs. Recently, for example, both ICT Hub Managers worked alongside the ICT team at Helena Romanes School to resolve a challenging issue which had arisen, with the outcome that the network has been reconfigured to work more

efficiently moving forwards. This was a great example of the team pulling together to provide a solution.

Over the next year we will be working on various Trust wide projects to improve the system's security and educating users regarding cyber security risks. We are also improving the WiFi provision in various schools and upgrading the infrastructure.

We are currently recruiting new staff at both Hubs to strengthen the team and further improve the support we can provide.

Dan Wright and Ben Johnson

ICT Hub Managers

Honywood School, Coggeshall



3 - James Saunders

Headteacher

Welcome to the Honywood family.

As I enter my fifth year at Honywood it continues to be an absolute privilege to lead the school. We have had a busy year and started this term on a real high note: a positive Ofsted outcome.

We actually received the Ofsted call right at the end of the summer term last year. Do you remember that day when temperatures were in the 40s and schools were closing early for health and safety reasons? Well, yes, they wanted to visit then. Unfortunately, there was only one more day of the term left and so we had to defer. When you defer they do not specify when they will return. We expected them to come in at the start of the year and had been counting down the days.

This was our first inspection under the new Ofsted framework, and my first one since joining Honywood almost five years ago and embarking on our improvement journey.

Whilst we have never done things to satisfy Ofsted or jumped onto the latest Ofsted bandwagon, it is nice to have up to date confirmation at a national level that we are providing a great education for the children within our community. I know that you can never please everyone all of the time so hopefully these comments will reassure everyone, most importantly our learners and their families, that we are doing the right things for the right reasons.

Ofsted visits are very different to how they used to be, and from my perspective a lot better. They tend to keep the Headteacher at arm's length; I do not get involved in many of the activities so that the evidence they collect is impartial. We are, of course, very pleased with our judgement of Good overall and in all categories. We entered the process wanting to achieve a solid Good. We knew we had not finished our journey and there was still work to do. However, at the end of the first day, after the lead inspector said to me *'you have nothing to worry about'*, he then said that *'for more than one area we could be looking at the Outstanding category'*. We came to the conclusion that, based on the feedback we had received from the team, they were suggesting that behaviour, personal development and leadership could all potentially achieve the Outstanding grade.

What the report does not tell you is how close we came to an 'outstanding' grading. I was rooting for **personal development as that area really captures what we are all about at Honywood** and what the school means to me personally. During day two, the lead inspector sat down with me to take me through the Parent View and learner feedback and at one point I had a tear in my eye - as did the inspector. As he flew through the statistics I was frantically scribbling them down. He then paused at one particular question that learners had responded to and said he had never seen this before in his many years of inspecting schools. It was the response to the question *'my school encourages me to respect learners from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally'*. 100% of learners responded positively to this question. That filled me with a warm glow.

The inspectors were so complimentary about the climate around the school and the conduct of our learners - they did not see one thing out of place during their time in our school, which they confirmed is quite rare. They really did understand how we balance our **traditional approach to standards** and expectations with a **progressive approach to learning** and a **culture of trust, respect, equity and excellence**. It was lovely to see our inclusive nature recognised along with the environment we have created that allows for all children, including those with special education needs and disabilities, to thrive.

So that's how the term started - high praise for our **inclusive culture of trust, respect, equity and excellence**. I would like to share with you some of the highlights of the term that support the personal development of our learners through our capital enhancing curriculum.

Careers and next steps

NHS Careers Trip and Paramedic Workshop

A group of Cohort 11 Health and Social Care learners visited Anglia Ruskin University (ARU) in Chelmsford for an introduction to NHS careers. ARU provides degrees in a range of NHS roles such as midwifery, paramedic, social work, nursing and operating department practices. It was a busy day packed with lectures and hands-on-activities. A really interesting introduction to further education for public sector health care roles. This trip was followed up with a further workshop in school from a paramedic.



Computing and Digital Media

Cohort 10 Computer Science learners visited the Centre for Computing History in Cambridge. During the day they took part in a workshop that placed them inside the world's largest processor. They could adjust the speed of the processor to see what it does when controlling a game of Tetris. Further workshops included using the programming language Python to control motors and a tour of the museum. I also lost my four-year unbeaten streak on the video game Street Fighter. Then, in March, the Cohort 9 Computer Science class visited the Digital Learning Centre at the Braintree Campus of the Colchester Institute. The workshop involved learning about video game design, esports, foley and sound effects, and running a live film studio. Some even turned their hand to presenting the weather! Learners left inspired about the possibilities that lay ahead in a career in the digital media industry.



A Career in Film - *"Creativity takes courage."* – Henri Matisse

Just prior to Christmas, a large film crew descended upon us. After much logistical organisation from Mrs Frogley, we were able to offer our learners the opportunity to be extras in an independent film and to watch the director and crew at work. This was a rare experience that we knew was too good to pass - where else can you get to be inside a living film set en masse? Our school is all about providing capital enhancing activities and this was certainly one. It brought learning to life for our GCSE Drama and Media learners in Cohorts 9 and 10.

They got to witness first-hand the hard work, patience and stamina needed to work in film as well as the wide range of roles that make up the crew. We were so impressed with our learners who sat for three hours whilst take after take and camera angle after camera angle was made. We were grateful to Peter Andre who was there to support his son, Junior, who was in the cast of the film. Peter spoke to learners at the end of the day about his journey from his humble beginnings in Australia to where he is now. We also found out that we have quite a Peter Andre fan base amongst our staff - and a few parents too! Experiences like this rarely come along. We are glad that our learners got to create some memories and feel what it is like to be in a film set.



Creative Careers

We have spoken in the past about the need to push the arts. As an industry the arts were hit really hard by the pandemic. In these dark times we are living through right now we should never underestimate the power of the arts and creativity to give us hope. The arts are something more than just an academic discipline or even a vocation, they are an essential part of our society. The arts can transform communities and can bring comfort, joy and reassurance. Ultimately, they are good for our wellbeing. The words of Plato say it better than me - *"If you think your child's academic studies are more important than the arts, think again."* This term, Mrs Bansropun launched the Cohort 8 creative careers project.

Over this term, our learners have been introduced to a range of arts based careers. These include set design, direction, stage management, wardrobe, dance and theatre. Learners have been using their learning group time to complete this programme, culminating in our end of term enrichment week which will involve performances in front of guest industry VIPs.

Brilliant Club

In January, our Cohort 9 and 10 learners attended the Brilliant Club launch at Queens' College Cambridge. They learnt about the prestigious scholars programme and were introduced to Dr Kash who told them about his academic journey and PhD in Philosophy. They then learnt about study techniques and the university system, including the application process and how assignments are graded. Dr Kash commented on how great our learners are. They were incredibly articulate and asked thoughtful questions. They are now working on their research in school with their PhD tutor, Alex, who specialises in politics and voting.

Some of us are certain about what we want to do in life, whilst others have no clue. However, the choices we make for GCSE can have an implication on the paths that we take post-16 and beyond. For those who are unsure what they want to do, we structure our curriculum choices in such a way as to keep the programme of study broad and balanced. As well as offering a range of enrichment activities to broaden the horizons of our learners, we also place emphasis on ensuring learners study subjects across our core disciplines of liberal arts, creative arts, science and industry. This will ensure that they do not close any doors as they progress to post-16 and will keep many careers open to them.



Healthy body and mind with our in-school enrichment programme

Jack Petchey Speak Out

We hosted the Speakers Trust on behalf of the Jack Petchey Foundation for our annual Speak Out Challenge. Twenty five Cohort 10 learners attended the workshop designed to give them an experience of public speaking. During the day they learnt how to structure a speech, how to deliver to an audience and more importantly, how to conquer those nerves!

UK Harvest Food Workshop

We were really lucky to have Sarah and Sian join us from UK Harvest for a brilliant food and fuel workshop with learners in Cohort 7 and 8. As part of the workshop, they had donated a class set of air fryers and slow cookers. We made use of the air fryers to cook delicious veggie burgers and chips, whilst learning about how to be fuel efficient, cost effective, and reduce food waste along the way. The learners involved were fantastic and seemed to very much enjoy sampling their meals!



Mental Health and Wellbeing support

Our Cohort 11 Lead Learners and Prefects have launched their new initiative and are offering support to younger learners in the library during lunchtime with any homework or classwork they are finding challenging. This complements the Peer Mentor Scheme that has been running for a couple of years. Younger learners are buddied up with an older peer mentor who meets with them regularly to support them with any issues in school. The application process to be a Peer Mentor is highly rigorous and very competitive. Earlier this year our Lead Learners led a training session for the Peer Mentors to become Mental Health Champions. There will be a further workshop later this term.

N-Act, Mental Health

We welcomed back the N-Act Theatre company who performed to Cohort 10. The play addressed the issues of mental health, particularly in boys. After the performance they shared information about where to get help, who to speak to and explained that it is "ok to not be ok". Cohort 10 were engaged and asked thought provoking, mature questions.

Smashed Workshop

Our Cohort 7 learners recently attended a brilliant workshop/performance called "Smashed". The performance highlighted the dangers of alcohol. Our learners were really engaged and asked some great questions. Thank you to Collingwood Learning.





World Book Day

It was so great to see everyone embrace World Book Day. Those that came to school as a character from their favourite book really looked the part. We extended this to staff and I am pleased that so many embraced it too. We had Alice in Wonderland, 101 Dalmatians, Peter Pan, Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Where's Wally, Harry Potter and many more books represented. The day was a real success. The evidence is quite clear that regular reading makes a difference to academic performance. The day culminated in a quiz during Learning Session 5 and a reward for Cohort 7, who had the most learners who were dressed up.







Dance Show

An annual highlight on our calendar is the Dance Show: a fantastic evening where learners from across all cohorts perform. From Cohort 7 to Cohort 11 we saw a range of styles, from GCSE work to musical theatre.

Developing our five capitals through enrichment visits



Maths Day

Cohort 10 learners had the opportunity to attend a Maths day at the University of Essex. The day consisted of speakers, competitions and interactive maths workshops with the opportunity for learners to meet learners from other schools.

Royal Opera House

We recently took 47 dancers from across a range of cohorts to visit the Royal Opera House to see Woolf Works, a set of three pieces by Wayne Macgregor. It was great to see learners from different cohorts working together. An exciting day out!

Enrichment Week

Each term we have a whole school Enrichment Week, when each cohort has a theme that is usually delivered through learning group time. The week also contains an enrichment experience, either in school or outside of school. We are currently looking forward to our spring term enrichment week which consists of the following activities:

Cohort 7 will be exploring outdoor learning and nature, as well as their local environment at Marks Hall.

Cohort 8 will be visiting the Mercury Theatre as part of the Creative Careers Project.

Cohort 9 will experience STEM and an adrenaline rush at Thorpe Park as they learn about roller coaster design and engineering.

Cohort 10 will be taking part in mock interviews, as well as a range of work-related activities including MADE training and an Army Elite skills day.

Cohort 11 will be completing a series of focused study days to prepare them for their final exams, followed by a day in London to complete the Bingo run. This Cohort 11 trip is one of our favourites. Learners are dropped off in their groups at Stratford and must complete a series of challenges that involve travelling across the capital.



Core Values

TRUST - RESPECT - EQUITY - EXCELLENCE

At Honywood, we continue to place relationships at the heart of learning. By understanding our learners as individuals we are able to support them when things get tough so that when they reach the end of the journey and they look back on all they have enjoyed, as well as endured, they are truly happy and successful. Our Core Values (Trust, Respect, Equity and Excellence) and Capitals (Moral, Social, Cultural, Knowledge and Professional) remain at the heart of what we are trying to achieve.

This term, our values have really been brought to life through our community response to global events.

We recently welcomed a new group of Afghan children to our school as part of the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme. The children and their families were evacuated from Afghanistan due to the dangerous and unpredictable situation in the country which emerged a little over a year ago following the withdrawal of US troops. They have found a safe haven in the UK and join our existing Ukrainian learners who were also displaced from their country last year.

A highlight of the term was a series of assemblies given to each cohort. In the assemblies one of our Ukrainian learners told her story and explained what it is like to be a refugee. It was an inspiring assembly that the whole school respected, and helped lay the foundation for the warm welcome of our Afghan refugees.

We believe that our school community has a unique opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of these children and their families. By welcoming them with open arms and showing them kindness and compassion, we can help them feel valued and included. Our school is a place where everyone is encouraged to be themselves, and where diversity is celebrated. At the start of this newsletter we shared feedback from our Ofsted inspection - 100% of learners were positive about the following statement: ***'My school encourages me to respect learners from other backgrounds and to treat everyone equally'***.

At Honywood we live our core values of Trust, Respect, Equity and Excellence.

Contact Us



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