

Our Community Matters

September 2022
Issue Nine



The latest news, views, and announcements for the
Community Academies Trust



#catschools/#schoolscat

Editor: Michelle Borders
communications@catschools.uk

INSIDE

Message from
Philip Hamilton OBE, CEO



Head Space

Meet Moira Cross,
Executive Headteacher of
The Dordon and Wood
End Primary Schools in the
spotlight



Ensuring Excellence

Celebrating Staff and
Student Achievement
across our trust



CAT Institute of Education Matters

Centre for professional
development and school
improvement

Collaborate and Thrive Unconference 4 July 2022



What a rollercoaster of a final term that was! Exams, proms, parties, sports days, results and a scorching few weeks of summer to boot....

As we return to a new autumn term, a big welcome goes out to all newcomers to our trust family of schools whether new students or new colleagues. Whatever your role is in our trust, I'm looking forward to hearing about all the new stories that happen every day in the life of your school. I'm always amazed at the innovation, creativity and the extra miles so many of you go to over and above the day job, proving just how much, we all care about our young people, their development and experiences beyond the four walls of the classroom. You can read about some of the memorable and enriching activities planned for our students across our trust and the fantastic opportunities on offer later in this publication.

Talking of creativity, how about that graffiti art at the top of this page? It's incredible isn't it? It comes from one of the schools featured in our Head Space article, Dordon Primary School. Executive Headteacher, Moira Cross talks about the amazing places that are Dordon and Wood End Primary Schools.

For those of you who missed it, there's an update on the Unconference and if you want a copy of any of the resources, you can find them on the OCMJ. And, as if all that wasn't enough, you can hear about the day Stratford Primary School was able to pose hard questions to Nadim Zahawi, whatever role he may be in at the time you read this.

In the meantime, hope you had a great summer and I'm looking forward to seeing the shenanigans to come.

Michelle, Editor
Our Community Matters



Message from Philip Hamilton OBE, CEO



A happy new academic year to you and a very warm welcome back. I especially welcome new staff and pupils - you are joining a wonderful professional staff team in your school and the wider family of over 1200 staff and 8500 pupils who work and learn across our 18 schools.

My personal thanks to the staff who have managed and led the work that has continued in our schools throughout the summer - there has been a lot going on, including summer schools, significant capital projects alongside the routine and crucially important day to day management of our sites.

In late July and August schools and pupils received examination results with so many individual success stories and achievements. These achievements have enabled successful progression into secondary schools, Post 16 education, higher education and the world of employment and apprenticeships. This is the result of a significant and wonderful collective effort from you all - congratulations.

This week provides our most significant opportunity in the year to make the most of the that new start feel, and to deliver on the planning and policy developments in your school and across our trust, many of which have been lined up to launch today. Our new trust strategy is also launched this week with actions in place to deliver on our 5 priorities for the next 5 years:

- [CAT Strategic Priority 1 - Expert Governance](#)
- [CAT Strategic Priority 2 - Quality of Education](#)
- [CAT Strategic Priority 3 - Workforce Resilience and Well Being](#)
- [CAT Strategic Priority 4 - Efficiency and Effectiveness of Operational Structures](#)
- [CAT Strategic Priority 5 - Public Benefit/Civic Duty](#)

One of my early actions linked to this is to come and talk directly to you about how we can maximise our collective potential as a family of schools for you professionally and for our pupils and families. Throughout this term I will be leading a staff meeting in each school to seek your views.

A reminder that there are significant opportunities to work with and learn from colleagues from other schools. This year (amongst other things) you can decide to:

- Join a CAT Professional Network and work with colleagues from other schools in our trust who do a similar job to you
- Join a CAT Expert Group if you are passionate about influencing others and innovating in different areas of education
- Work with your professional coach as part of our trust wide Growing Great People approach to your professional growth
- Sign up to the OCM Journal: <https://www.theocmjournal.com/> for some wonderful examples of how our colleagues lead and achieve excellence every day in their classrooms and schools.

For more information contact our Institute of Education with an email to ioe@catschools.uk
Have a great term.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Philip Hamilton'.

Philip Hamilton OBE, CEO

Head Space

Schools in the Spotlight:

Dordon and Wood End Primary Schools

by Executive Headteacher Moira Cross



You are an important part of the puzzle.

If you had told me 10 years ago I would be sitting here writing in this role, I would have laughed. For at that time, I was the deputy head of Dordon – a school on the infamous list of the bottom 500 schools in the country, with an academy sponsorship looming on the horizon. At that time, primary academies were rare, in fact I didn't know of any. As you can imagine, the prospect was daunting.

At Dordon, we were fortunate that our sponsorship wasn't by one of the large chains we were hearing horror stories about. Two of our local schools – Polesworth and Birchwood – were forming an academy trust and we were the first of their sponsored schools. We converted to academy status in November 2012 along with Polesworth and Birchwood.

10 years ago, Dordon had 89 children and 4 classes. There is a core of staff still in school who were here for the early days of academisation. We have seen the school grow from 4 classes to single form entry of 204 pupils with 2 good OFSTED judgments under our belts – the last being 2018.

As for me, I took on the deputy headship in 2009 vowing that I would stay for about 4 years before moving onto another deputy headship. I was adamant that, like my dad, I would be a career deputy – teaching as much as I could because it was the one thing I was good at.



Fate had other plans though. As the academy grew, I became a teaching Head of School, then in 2016 the Headteacher of Dordon in my own right. Now I find myself as an Executive Headteacher of Dordon and Wood End although I rarely use the title. I often wonder how I have got to this point – 13 years down the line from my appointment at Dordon!

OCM Issue Nine September 2022

I am incredibly lucky to have two fantastic Associate Heads -Sinead McGroarty and Joanne Smith- who run the schools day to day and I could not do my role successfully without them. They ensure both Dordon and Wood End run smoothly. However, without doubt, there are days when overseeing two schools can feel overwhelming. The problems and issues of both schools can end up at my door and if I am not careful they can dominate my days. At times like this, I make sure I get up from my desk and go and see the children. It is important to stay in touch with my why - the children are my why. As I said at the recent induction meeting for new parents at Dordon, if I am feeling overwhelmed, I head straight to reception. Walking through the door into Peacock class, I feel like a rock star and I cannot help but smile!



Another tool in helping me to maintain a positive outlook (I do try!) is a done list. I used to write 'to do' lists but as you can imagine that was a long list and some days, because of matters arising, nothing was ever crossed off. This has a negative impact on a sense of wellbeing and worth. So now I write a done list. This is simply a list of all the jobs I have achieved on a given day. Needless to say, on the days where nothing would have been crossed off on a traditional 'to do' list there is plenty listed on the done list.

This was a tip I picked up from Twitter - one of many. I find Twitter an invaluable source of CPD. It is a quick and easy way to access blogs and educational comment. It has certainly helped me developed my PLN.

So, my position now is a million miles from where I was 10 years ago at the start of the Community Academies Trust. That time was full of trepidation and doubt for Dordon and for me on a professional level. It required faith, humility and vast amounts of resilience to get to the position we are all in now. Dordon is now in a strong, stable position and has provided support to other Trust schools. Although I don't teach as often as I would like to, I get to see others doing the best job in the world every day.



Ensuring Excellence



The day the Secretary of State for Education came to visit Stratford Primary School

By Executive Headteacher, Gill Humphriss

Children can be so insightful! The children from Stratford Primary School get the scoop from Nadhim Zahawi the then Secretary of State for Education and ask him the tough questions.

On Friday 27th May 2022 we welcomed Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP for Stratford and Secretary of State for Education to Stratford Primary.

As our local Member of Parliament, he likes to keep in touch with the community and regularly visits different areas of the town. The children invited him to come and see our Platinum Jubilee trail and Year 5 decided that they would interview him as a significant person in our country. Louise Withers (Head of School) and myself decided that we should not miss up the chance to question The Secretary of State for Education and share our views on the recent white paper and the green paper for SEND. When would we ever get the chance to be close to the main decision maker again? So, the scene was set.



Two of our Year 6 pupils volunteered to show him around the school and explain the different aspects of our jubilee trail. Maia and Conor admitted they were quite nervous but we reassured them he was just a human being like all of us. 'Mr Zahawi was genuinely interested in everything' Maia said. 'He took part in the interactive quizzes, had a selfie with a corgi, learnt how to make a red, white and blue pompom, asked how year 6 had made their fabric paintings to celebrate The Queen and we felt really proud of our school. It was difficult to keep our MP to time, he went into every classroom and talked to the pupils and teachers about their learning.'

Year 5 had been busy planning their questions. What do you ask The Secretary of State for Education? They all knew him from the news but some of the children also pass him in the street so they wanted to ask him something about Stratford but also that political question which I am sure many of us have been thinking as the government leadership comes under scrutiny:

Q: What do you do to help the community of Stratford Upon Avon?

A: I listen to the community's problems in my weekly surgery. It is my favourite time of the week when I get to meet the different residents. I also like to make sure that I support local businesses. I have many different meetings with the council, business leaders and local residents.

Q: Are you friends with Boris Johnson?

A: I speak with him a couple of times a week and I am a good friend of his. I have been his friend for over 20 years. We talk about education a lot. It is important to us both.



Q: Would you like to be the Prime Minister?

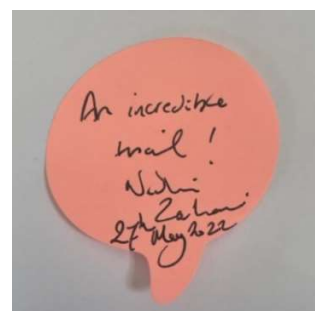
A: I would like to be Prime Minister; however, my job is to support Boris Johnson. If I was Prime Minister education would be at the top of my agenda. I know how important education is and it is thanks to teachers in this country that I have done so well. I came to this country as a refugee from Baghdad. I couldn't speak English but teachers helped me to settle and learn and that is why I want to make our education system the best it can be.

Q: Do you know any secret agents?

A: That would be telling " " I know some secret agents

Q: What is your favourite part of your job?

A: My favourite day of the job is Friday as I come back to Stratford to see the people of Stratford.



Q: Have you ever met The Queen?

A: During the pandemic we had daily COBR(Cabinet Office Briefing Room) meetings. The Queen would join us on a big screen. I have been to the palace. Just lately I had an hour's face to face meeting with Prince Charles to discuss sustainability and how we can teach children about keeping our planet safe. It is always a privilege to meet The Royal Family.



After a quick press photo call Louise and I invited Nadhim to join us for a cup of Yorkshire tea to share our views on education. Yes we had got the good biscuits out (Biscoff sandwiches) and Nadhim offered to pour the tea. There was even a bit of flattery; apparently he wished he could clone people like Louise and I as he was super impressed with the provision of the school. We wondered how often this line is said! Although we'll take the compliment! We took the time to explain how we felt that children with special educational needs are being let down in this country through not only a lack of funding but lack of provision. We explained that it took too long for EHCP's to be granted due to the nature of evidence required. He listened as we shared teachers should be trusted as we know the children in our care. Nadhim explained that he is committed to improving SEND provision and increase the number of alternative provision settings and special schools. He also shared his vision to reinstate children's centres so that social services and schools can work side by side without bureaucracy getting in the way. He wants a social worker in every school. He is keen to use data to show parents how well schools are actually doing. What this will look like remains to be seen. We only had 20 minutes with him but we did feel listened to. It remains to be seen if SEND provision changes over the next few years.



To finish his time at Stratford Primary we let him ring our bell. Our school bell is as old as the school and some significant people have rung it and posed for a photo; mayors of the town, children's authors and Argus Filch (Caretaker from Harry Potter). Overall, the day The Secretary of State for Education came to visit was fun; children and staff alike said, 'we really liked him!'

The Wilnecote School Geography Department checks out the ecosystem at Cannock Chase



By Carl Savage, Communications Manager, The Wilnecote School

On Friday 17th June our Year 10 Geography students braved the sun to conduct their GCSE fieldwork enquiry.

During the day we travelled to Birches Valley in Cannock Chase where students were collecting data to prove that human activity was having a negative effect on the ecosystem in the area. Year 10 investigated the rate of erosion in the forest and the level of vegetation affected by humans. It was fantastic to see so many students getting involved and really enjoying the fieldtrip after two years off due to Covid.

Once students completed their first enquiry, we headed to Stafford town centre where Year 10 were investigating whether a new development of the edge of the town centre was having a negative effect on the town centre itself. Whilst in each location students conducted a bi-polar analysis of the area, where they judged how presentable the area was, and a pedestrian count to see how popular each area was.



Students also got some free time to grab lunch where they enjoyed the local cuisine of Stafford (McDonalds!).

Everyone involved had a great time and thoroughly enjoyed their day out in the sun.

The Highly Sprung Show 2022

by Carl Savage, Communications Manager, The Wilnecote School



On June 30th some of the Wilnecote School Year 7,8 & 9 Students had the opportunity to participate in the Changing Climates Festival, working with the theatre company

Highly Sprung. During two days of intensive workshops students created a performance which explored the issue of climate change. Students worked with Highly Sprung artist Sarah Radbourne to create their physical theatre piece, using movement to tell a story. They then travelled to the Belgrade Theatre in Coventry on June 7th where they participated in workshops and finally performed their piece. During the day students created puppets with the theatre company Moth, they thought about how they could use movement to bring the puppets to life.

They also watched an exclusive premier of theatre company Complicite's new film about climate change and created their own work in response to this before completing a masterclass with Highly Sprung directors Sarah and Mark Worth. The day focused on exploring the issue of climate change, raising student's awareness of the topic. It was a busy three days and students worked hard to create their performance and learn new skills. They all worked really well together. As students were from a mixture of year groups it was good to see new friendships being formed. It was a pleasure to see student's confidence develop over the three days and to witness their incredible performance. We are very proud of all the students involved.

Dordon Primary School celebrates the Commonwealth Games in style

By Sinead McGroarty, Dordon Primary School



At Dordon Primary School, we held a **Creative Commonwealth Day** to introduce the Commonwealth games which are being held in Birmingham this year. We work closely with our school community here and one of our parents, who is working on the games, came in to design an inspiring day with our staff to start the celebrations off. We were lucky enough to have a singer, musician and dance teacher join us to share music and dance from across the Commonwealth with our pupils. All of the children had the opportunity to take part in these activities in addition to making their own batons, designing flags and even writing postcards to the athletes.

The day was full of excitement and even some of our pupils who felt a little nervous about the activities at the start of the day, showed wonderful resilience and as a result had a day to remember!



Introducing....

Alison Bardsley, Financial Director, The Community Academies Trust



Hello, my name is Alison Bardsley and I am the Executive Director Finance and Operations for the trust. It's a bit of a long job title, but essentially I see myself as an accountant who, over the years, has branched out into the multitude of areas that are essential for the efficient running of a large organisation like our trust.

After a maths degree at university, I qualified as an accountant back in the early 1990s with an accountancy practice called Grant Thornton based in London. Much of my work there was auditing companies to check their financial accounts were correct. Soon after qualifying an opportunity arose with a client company based in the Midlands whose business was fitting the interiors of shops, banks, restaurants etc. This led me to move to Lichfield and work in the world of manufacturing and construction.

My husband and I have two boys and I spent 10 years working part-time, first for another accountancy practice, Ernst & Young in Birmingham and then for an IT recruitment business based in Lichfield. I also did some accounting for a small local advertising consultancy. As is the way with these things, my working days increased, the boys went to school and I decided to go back to work full time. I had a short stint as the accountant for an air-conditioner installer (back to construction!) but saw an opportunity that intrigued me to work for Staffordshire Local Authority advising their 400 schools on managing their finances. By then I was a governor at the boys' primary school and so I had enough insight into education finance to get the job.

I loved my time at Staffordshire and felt I was a bit like James Herriot, travelling the length and breadth of the County in my little car and advising Headteachers, governors and school finance staff. The work we did was always appreciated as the skills I brought were in a slightly different area from the skills required to run a successful school educationally, but together we could really make a difference to pupils' experiences and outcomes.

Over time I came to lead the finance support team and the team was outsourced by the Council to a new joint venture that many of you will have heard of, called Entrust. At Entrust I took on leading the HR team as well as Finance, but ended up spending more time in the office and less time with the people in schools, which is what I enjoyed. I came to Community Academies Trust just as it was in its rapid expansion phase with six schools already in the trust and the three Telford secondary schools about to join. It was brilliant to be back in a role where we are all working together for school improvement.

My role at the trust has changed over the last seven years as the trust has matured, but it is still very much about ensuring that we meet our financial, employer, Health & Safety and many other obligations along with working together to develop and ensure excellence in everything we do. I also want to contribute to our trust becoming more environmentally sustainable and reduce our impact on the environment so our pupils have a future to look forward to.

Our boys have grown up. The eldest is a nuclear scientist with a degree and Phd from Cambridge. He is working on developing nuclear fusion to solve the energy crisis. A granddaughter was born during lockdown and another grandchild is due later this year. My youngest son is getting married in Lichfield cathedral next summer. He took the apprenticeship route and is a bellhanger, installing and repairing church bells across the country.

Outside of work you will likely find me planning my next holiday. As the boys have left home these have got more exotic. We had a fabulous time in Chile just before lockdown but more recently have been using the excuse of family history to explore beautiful areas of the UK.

Education Matters



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[SPEAKERS](#)



We're absolutely thrilled at the success of our very first Unconference. The idea of the Unconference was to showcase the work our Expert Groups have been undertaking throughout the year. We had presentations focused on approaches to leadership, using pupil premium, creating a whole school culture, flipped classrooms, and assessments.

Complementing this work, we invited three fabulous keynote speakers to give their views on curriculum, leadership and building a culture within an organisation. You can catch up with the keynotes, the presentations and associated links and resources by clicking on the picture above.

Pupil Experiences Project - “ten things to do as a CAT student”

by Chris Quinney, Deputy Head, The Polesworth School

The Pupil Experiences Project aims to enhance the memorable and enriching experiences which students receive across our Trust schools, supporting their development of skills to ensure excellence. They provide students with opportunities to further develop qualities of being creative, adventurous, active, aware and respectful by building upon the existing excellent practice in our schools.

I presented the “ten things to do as a CAT student” to the Trust Headteachers forum and we are now moving into the implementation phase to ensure that all of our Trust students benefit from these fantastic opportunities! We are engaging and getting support from external organisations such as Big Brum Theatre Company, the charity NCDS, Wasps and the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award.

Phase	Quality	Experience	Phase	Quality	Experience
Primary	Creative	Be creative with an artist	Secondary	Creative	Perform with a professional theatre company
	Adventurous	Challenge yourself in the outdoors		Adventurous	Survive an expedition in a remote area
	Active	Play on a professional pitch		Active	Develop first-hand experiences of the workplace
	Aware	Be a community problem-solver		Aware	Experience a new environment
	Respectful	Hold a conversation in sign language		Respectful	Meet a Holocaust survivor

CAT Institute of Education Matters



A spotlight on the trust's centre for Teacher Training, Professional Development and school improvement by Alexis Rickus, Director of Institute of Education

One of the big developments this year will be standardizing the nights on which expert groups and professional networks will meet. To this end, we'll be using Zoom events going forward as an events and training platform. The dates for the groups have been fixed as follows:

Expert Groups	Network Groups
21 Sept 22	28 Sept 22
23 Nov 22	30 Nov 22
18 Jan 23	25 Jan 23
8 Mar 23	15 Mar 23
26 May 23	3 May 23
28 June 23	5 July 23

Please make a note of these dates in your diaries. **Times will be 3.30 to 4.30pm.** If you'd like to join any of these groups then please contact ioe@catschools.uk and we'll add you to the team. If you have an idea for a group you might like to run, or you think should be represented, then again contact us and we'll see what we can do.

Related to Expert Groups, the Assessment Expert group have been looking at some of the work by Tom Sherrington and Oliver Caviglioli, in particular the Walkthru material and how it can be used to support the development of effective teaching. Headteachers have been given the login and passwords to access the walkthrough platform which will provide a myriad of free resources for you in addition to a limited quantity of walkthru booklets. Further details about the walkthrus will be shared within the Assessment Expert Group as they continue their work next year.

And finally, Developing People is moving online. The brochure will be downloadable, but courses will be searchable and bookable via an online calendar which will be accessible via our new website. However, until the website goes live, all the IoE activities can be seen on the existing events calendar currently on our website here:

<http://catteachingschool.org/events/>

Alexis Rickus
Director, CAT Institute of Education



And finally.....

Hopefully you found us on Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/schoolscat/> (#schoolscat) as well as on Twitter @SchoolsCat (#catschools). Follow us and we'll follow you back. Some great pictures this half term, productions, joined up school trips, sports days and prizes. Can't wait for next term 😊

Our Half Term in Pictures



Thank you to everyone who has contributed to this issue and made this edition possible. This publication will drop into your inbox at the start of each half term. Don't forget to subscribe to the OCM Journal Please email any articles, news to communications@catschools.uk.

Our Community Matters

