

2015 / 2016

SECONDARY EDUCATION EDITION

# *The Parliamentary Review*

A YEAR IN PERSPECTIVE

## ■ FOREWORDS

The Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP

The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

## ■ MIDLANDS & EAST OF ENGLAND REPRESENTATIVES

Nunnery Wood High School

Kesteven & Grantham Girls' School

Ormiston Shelfield Community  
Academy

Parkside Community School

Sir Graham Balfour School

Broadway Academy

Stratford-upon-Avon School

Cromwell Community College

Thomas Becket Catholic School

## ■ FEATURES

Review of the Year

Review of Parliament





## The Rt Hon Philip Hammond

Chancellor of the Exchequer

This Government is clear that a strong economy is the essential prerequisite to delivering prosperity and improved life chances for all, building a Britain that truly works for everyone, not a few.

Since 2010, we have made significant progress. Britain has been one of the fastest growing advanced economies in the world over the last few years; our employment rate has reached record highs as living standards rose to the highest level ever last year. At the same time, the deficit as a share of GDP has been cut by almost two-thirds from its post-war peak in 2009–10.

While the decision to leave the European Union marks the beginning of a new chapter for our country and our economy, we start from a position of strength and our economy is well-placed to confront the challenges ahead.

Britain will, in due course, begin negotiations to leave the European Union. We recognise there may be some uncertainty as we negotiate and then a period of adjustment as the economy transitions to the post-EU reality. As we go forward, we are determined to build on our strengths as an open, dynamic, trading nation to forge a new global role for Britain.

We are determined to make a success of Brexit and have seen some positive developments with large companies such as Siemens and Lockheed Martin confirming that the UK remains an attractive place for them to invest.

This is all good to see but we cannot be complacent. At the same time as we seek the best possible trade

arrangements with our European neighbours, we must also redouble our efforts to promote trade with the rest of the world. Since the referendum we have seen a number of countries indicating their wish to agree trade deals with the UK, and I'm certain the list will continue to grow.

People can be assured that we are prepared to take the necessary steps to safeguard the economy in the short term and to take advantage of the opportunities that arise in the longer term as we forge a new relationship with the European Union.

The message we take to the world is this: we are the same outward-looking, globally-minded, big-thinking country we have always been – and we remain very firmly open for business.

“As we go forward, we are determined to build on our strengths as an open, dynamic, trading nation to forge a new global role for Britain”

## The Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Education Select Committee



As Schools Minister in 2001–2, I introduced TeachFirst. Last February I joined the Education Select Committee. Some things have changed dramatically in the past fifteen years – and some haven't.

Local Education Authorities I dealt with are being replaced by Multi-Academy Trusts. We didn't have Schools Commissioners in the past. Sir David Carter, the National Schools Commissioner, told the Select Committee in June 2016 that 'we are trying to academise the system'.

Tory opposition scuppered the plan announced by the Chancellor, George Osborne, to academise the entire system by 2022 but the Government's goal remains unchanged. Evidence increasingly suggests that academisation is not the solution for raising school standards. Academisation before 2010 – applied to failing schools – did deliver improvement.

Among the much wider range of schools converting since 2010, outstanding schools becoming academies have become better still. However, standards in other schools becoming academies since 2010 have not improved. Some Multi-Academy Trusts are doing brilliantly but others have expanded much too fast. We are starting to see in some the kind of stifling bureaucratic control which gave LEAs a bad name. Schools' local accountability is being lost and the requirement for Parent Governors abolished. Many academies don't have Governors any more. Instead power is centralised in the hands of Trustees and local interests sit only on a talking shop.

A few Trusts have troubling links with companies with which they do business. The former Education Secretary suggested that Trusts with no track record of improving their schools shouldn't be allowed to expand and that disgruntled parents might petition for their local academy to leave its current Trust and transfer to another, giving parents a backstop power. I hope her successor, Justine Greening, will pursue these ideas.

Large scale conversion of schools to academies won't solve the school standards challenge. Just as fifteen years ago, we have a teacher recruitment crisis. At that time, TeachFirst was key to the successful response.

I hope ministers will respond successfully this time round and that schools will be enabled to equip the next generation to build the kind of society and economy of which we all want to be part.

“Schools will be enabled to equip the next generation to build the kind of society and economy of which we all want to be a part”

## The rebellion that sunk the flagship policy to make all schools academies



Former Chancellor George Osborne, announced all state schools would have to become academies by 2020

On Budget Day Chancellors like to pull a rabbit out of the hat, but this year's surprise package wasn't about tax or finances but about the future shape of the state school system in England.

In March, George Osborne announced that all state schools would have to become academies, with a deadline set for 2020 for the conversion to have been completed or there to be plans in place for academy status by 2022.

This sweeping announcement was delivered in conjunction with the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, and would have been the biggest policy announcement of the year for schools; in the end it turned into the most high-profile reversal and by the time this story had run its full course, both Chancellor and Education Secretary had lost their jobs.

The Chancellor's announcement wasn't entirely without prior warning. There had been signals, including some from

the Prime Minister, David Cameron, that there was a desire to end schools being run by local authorities.

That had seemed like a forecast of the general direction of travel – with most secondary schools already having become academies – rather than an impending and compulsory requirement.

The announcement by Mr Osborne would have meant the remaining local authority secondary schools having to change status but the biggest upheaval would be in the primary sector.

Four out of five primary schools have remained as part of local authority networks and there were immediate questions about the practicality of thousands of, quite possibly reluctant, primary schools having to be turned into free-standing academies or matched with academy trusts.

A fact that made this an even more difficult proposition was that many of these primary schools were already rated good or outstanding, raising the question as to the purpose of creating so much disruption for schools that already seemed to be successful.

What really made this such a politically controversial issue was that much of the scepticism came from the Government's own benches.

Teachers' unions had voiced their anger at the proposals to force all schools to change status. They accused the Government of trying to push through an expensive reorganisation





Concerns about the impact of academisation, specifically on smaller and rural schools, have been raised

without any evidence that it would raise standards. The Labour Party also challenged the academy plans, arguing it would remove local democratic accountability and that such structural changes failed to address the practical issues facing schools, such as the struggle to recruit teachers but the biggest blow came from a sizeable number of Conservative backbenchers who remained unconvinced about the compulsory academy plans.

An Opposition Day debate in the House of Commons on the Government's White Paper proposals was dominated by criticism from Conservative MPs.

'Call me old fashioned, but I hold the view that if you've got a well-governed, well-run school that's performing well, just leave it alone and let it do its job,' said Will Quince, reflecting the comments of many of his Conservative colleagues.

MPs with high-achieving local authority schools in their constituencies saw little merit in such a compulsory upheaval when it seemed to be without any real support from either headteachers or parents. There was sharp criticism

about a policy which seemed to impose a lack of choice without any proof of necessity.

There were particular concerns about what this might mean for small rural schools and unease at the idea of popular, successful local primary schools being taken over by academy chains that might be based in another part of the country.

With the task of defending plans against cross-party criticism, Mrs Morgan told the NASUWT's teachers' conference that there was 'no reverse gear' but the opponents in her own party showed no sign of retreat – and they made it clear that they would stop the proposals as they stood.

As well as a broad swathe of backbench MPs, there were prominent grassroots Conservative voices in local government who spoke out publicly against their own party policy. The evidence on whether academy status would improve results was also ambiguous. Most academies are so-called 'converter' academies which had already been high performing schools, so their continuing achievement

wasn't really to do with how they were labelled. There were clearer signs of improvement for 'sponsored' academies, which had often previously had weaker results.

Even if this strengthened the argument for academy status for underperforming schools, it did not advance the case for excellent schools to be required to change against their will. It was this element of compulsion that proved the sticking point.

It had become apparent that even if there was 'no reverse gear' for the forced academy plan, it would certainly need a good set of brakes.

Less than two months after the academy deadline had been proposed,

the Education Secretary announced a climb down. Good schools might be encouraged to become academies but it would no longer be compulsory.

It was a major U-turn. It also proved to be something of a last stand for Nicky Morgan as Education Secretary. The decision over whether she would press on with the rest of her school reform plans was put to one side during the EU referendum campaign.

It was a question she would never answer because, when the political fall-out had finished, the new Prime Minister, Theresa May, replaced Nicky Morgan with a new Education Secretary, Justine Greening.

## Political upheavals that overturned the landscape for education

This year's political earthquake was the referendum on whether the UK should leave the European Union – and the shockwaves from that seismic event

produced some unexpected twists and turns for the leading political figures in education.

In what might now seem like another political era, the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, began the academic year facing her new opposite number, Shadow Education Secretary, Lucy Powell.

Ms Powell had taken over as Labour's Education Spokeswoman in September 2015, replacing Tristram Hunt, as part of an opposition team put together by the party's newly-elected leader, Jeremy Corbyn but she resigned in June 2016.

After their general election mauling, the Liberal Democrats began to rebuild their education profile with John Pugh as their spokesman.

Mrs Morgan, having been re-appointed after last year's general election,

Lucy Powell replaced Tristram Hunt as Labour's Education Spokesperson, before resigning in June 2016



was seen as having a key role in delivering David Cameron's plans to improve underachieving state schools and to encourage more schools to become academies.

The Education Secretary announced plans to tackle 'coasting schools' which were not doing enough to make sure pupils reached their full potential. This included plans for schools which were underachieving to be turned into academies.

The Education Department was also keen to promote another of Downing Street's favourite projects, the target to create 500 free schools within the lifetime of the Parliament.

Political lifetimes can be unexpectedly truncated and a chain of events saw all such confident, long-term planning, for government and opposition, swept away by unforeseen storms.

Barely had the ink dried on her legislation to improve 'coasting' schools, when Mrs Morgan faced her first unanticipated thundercloud. The Chancellor, George Osborne, in his Budget speech, threw her the challenge of forcing every state school in England to become an academy.

The rejection from MPs within her own party was almost immediate – and with the Government only having a slim House of Commons majority of 12, it became apparent that she faced an uphill and ultimately insurmountable struggle. Instead of being a Secretary of State serenely laying out her own plans for the school system, she became locked in a losing and bruising battle with her own backbench colleagues. It meant that she faced weeks of attempted negotiations before having to publicly concede defeat.

If politics requires luck Mrs Morgan might have felt unfortunate in a series of embarrassing difficulties



Justine Greening,  
Secretary of State for  
Education

over primary school tests with leaked papers, problems with reliability and then claims of sabotage all making headlines. The collective impression was not what she would have intended.

In addition, her challenges with changes to primary tests continued when she had to issue a warning that changes to SATs tests, making them more difficult, meant that results could no longer be compared with previous years.

If these had proved rocky months for the Education Secretary, it was all overshadowed by the impact of the EU referendum.

Mrs Morgan had campaigned, with her long-time ally David Cameron, in defence of remaining in the EU. She had issued a strong warning saying that the adverse economic consequences of leaving would be most harshly felt by the young.

Both the Education Secretary and her Shadow, Lucy Powell, were to lose their posts in the aftermath of Brexit.

Ms Powell must have thought her first year as her party's Education Spokeswoman had been very successful. The U-turn over academies would have counted as a major



triumph for the opposition and Ms Powell had pushed hard on issues such as teacher shortages and weaknesses with some academy chains.

Instead the recriminations within the Labour Party following the EU referendum saw her walking out of the Shadow Cabinet, along with many of her colleagues, who wanted Jeremy Corbyn to step down as leader.

She had only been Shadow Education Secretary for nine months when she resigned in June. What should have been a successful debut became a hurried departure.

Her successor, Pat Glass, proved an even shorter-lived education spokeswoman for Labour. With a longstanding career in education and having served on the House of Commons education select committee, she described her appointment as her 'dream job'. Two days later, with Labour's leadership turmoil continuing, she resigned saying that her position was no longer tenable. It raised questions about whether this was the shortest ever time in post by a Shadow Education Secretary.

Mr Corbyn replaced her with Angela Rayner, a 36-year-old who had entered the House of Commons in 2015 as MP for Ashton-under-Lyne. Before her

promotion, she had spent less than a week as Shadow Minister for Women and Equalities.

It meant that Labour – once the party of 'education, education, education' – had had three Shadow Education Secretaries in the space of a week.

If the reverberations of the EU referendum caused huge and unresolved changes within the Labour Party, there was also a massive upheaval within the Conservative Government.

David Cameron stepped down as Prime Minister and his successor, Theresa May, announced a far-reaching reshuffle in July that removed Nicky Morgan from office.

Justine Greening, formerly in charge of international development and the first openly gay female Cabinet Minister, was announced as the next Education Secretary, with an expanded remit to include universities. She will now have to put forward a new set of ideas for education in the autumn, from a party under new leadership.

When Nicky Morgan and Lucy Powell began the year, arguing across the chamber of the House of Commons, they could have had little expectation that both of them would be returning to the backbenches by the summer break.

## Ofsted's fiercest watchdog, Sir Michael Wilshaw, steps down

Sir Michael Wilshaw, the outspoken head of Ofsted, has been one of the most influential figures in education in recent years but he is stepping down at the end of the year and the Education Secretary has named his successor as Amanda Spielman.

This brought attention to what has made Sir Michael such a dominant character in debates about education. An unusual row about Ms Spielman's appointment raised questions about whether the education watchdog would be different under new management.

When Sir Michael became Chief Inspector for England's schools he was seen as working in step with the Education Secretary, Michael Gove; so much so that they were known as 'the two Michaels'.

However Sir Michael proved to be an independent-minded and fearless figure who was ready to challenge ministers and highlight weaknesses in government policy.

This became most apparent this year in the arguments over whether all schools should be forced to become academies. Sir Michael made a high-profile intervention that many academy chains were underperforming and that their top managers were overpaid. As a former academy head, he made it clear that switching to academy status was no guarantee of improvement.

Such directness did not make him popular with ministers but he saw it as his responsibility to present the evidence found by his inspectors, even if the conclusions were politically inconvenient.

His outspoken approach also made him unpopular with the teachers' unions who criticised Ofsted for putting unfair pressure on teachers. They saw his approach as bruising rather than inspiring.

Sir Michael had made his name as a no-nonsense inner London headteacher, who had turned around struggling schools. He had worked as a teacher, often in deprived areas, for more than forty years and he had a distrust of ideological distractions.

He warned that it was often pupils from the poorest families who were 'caught in the crossfire' in the political battles in education.

In a speech in June, looking back on his long career in schools, Sir Michael said that schools in the 1970s and



Free school meals are still needed in deprived areas

1980s had suffered from left-wing ideologies which promoted 'anti-academic nonsense' and which had 'undermined the authority and respect of school leaders'.

He also attacked the influence of 'free marketers' on the right, warning that it needed much more than the 'magic of the market' or some 'hastily rebranded schools' to make improvements that would last.

As the Chief Inspector prepared to step down, he said the biggest unresolved problem was the 'continuing failure as a nation to improve the lives of our poorest children'.

'The lot of disadvantaged children in primary schools has improved – a bit. But in secondary schools, the attainment gap between children on free school meals and their better-off peers has refused to budge in a decade.

'Despite all the good intentions, the fine words and some imaginative initiatives, we are not making a real difference. The needle has barely moved,' he commented.

The next Chief Inspector of Education will be Amanda Spielman, whose experience includes being the chair of another education watchdog, Ofqual,



Nicky Morgan, former Secretary of State for Education, was advised by MPs not to appoint Amanda Spielman as the new Head of Ofsted

the body responsible for regulating exams and qualifications in England. She was also one of the team that founded the Ark chain of academies, which is seen as one of the success stories of the academy movement.

What should have been a straightforward appointment has, however, proved to be an unexpected power struggle.

Ms Spielman had to appear before the House of Commons Education Select Committee, in what would have been expected to be a rubber-stamping of the Education Secretary's endorsed candidate. The MPs, showing their own streak of independence, decided that her answers were so lack lustre that they told Nicky Morgan that she should not proceed with the appointment. The cross-party committee of MPs said they had 'significant concerns' about her suitability to be the new head of Ofsted.

This was a substantial snub but the select committee does not have a right

of veto, which meant that Mrs Morgan could, and did, decide to overrule the MPs and pressed ahead with putting Ms Spielman into the post.

Teachers' unions said that the MPs' concerns followed their own criticism that Ms Spielman was being appointed as Chief Inspector of Schools, even though she had never had experience as a teacher.

Under Sir Michael, Ofsted was a watchdog that wasn't afraid to bark. His argument was that the Chief Inspector's job was to maintain standards in schools, even if that meant crossing swords with politicians or teachers' leaders.

Ms Spielman, having survived attempts to block her, will have to put her own stamp and style of leadership on Ofsted. She might not have been particularly outspoken in her previous jobs but as Chief Inspector she will be taking on a role that is never far from controversy.

## The long road to finding a fairer way to fund schools

Amid all the political earthquakes this year, there was another more practical, long-running debate that is likely to have far-reaching consequences. How should schools be funded? How much money should each school be allocated?

For many years there have been calls for a more consistent and fairer approach to how much public money is given to state schools. The amount schools receive per pupil can vary widely depending on factors such as where the school is located and the particular needs of the intake; extra funding is given to schools in deprived areas.

There has been a long-running campaign saying that the spread of money has become much too uneven and that there needed to be a fundamental overhaul. Campaigners for a new national funding formula have said that some schools receive £6,300 per pupil per year, while others might only receive £4,200.

Of course, making funding 'fairer' by increasing support for schools in one part of the country might seem very unfair to schools who end up receiving less.

Inner city schools, particularly in London, are thought to be vulnerable to such a change and any cutting

of individual school budgets would be politically sensitive. This delicate political balancing act has meant that for many years there has been support in principle for a 'national funding formula' but this has remained a thorny challenge to put into practice.

Last year's Conservative election manifesto promised to grasp this nettle – and the Chancellor, George Osborne, signalled a move towards such a national funding formula in his spending review statement in November 2015.

'We will phase out the arbitrary and unfair school funding system that has systematically underfunded schools in whole swathes of the country.

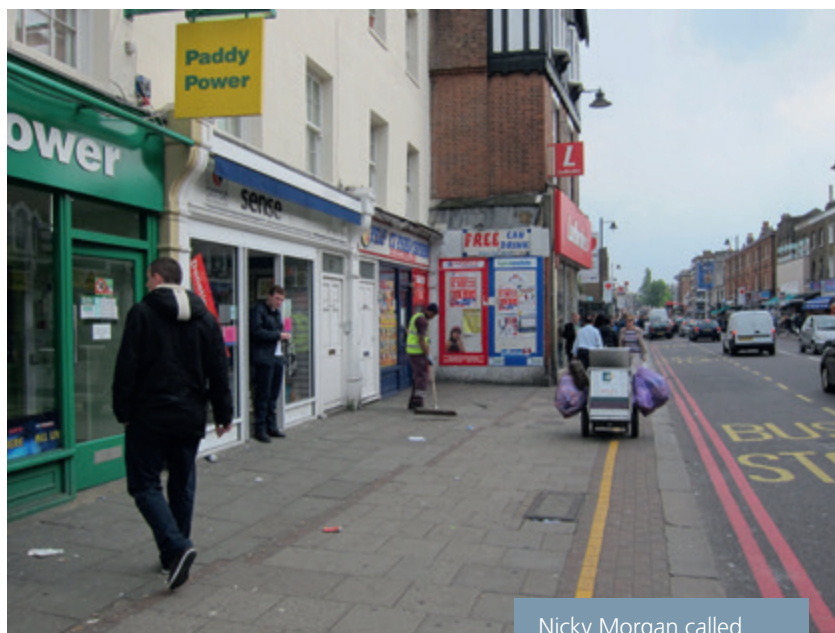
'Under the current arrangements, a child from a disadvantaged background in one school can receive half as much funding as a child in identical circumstances in another school,' said Mr Osborne.

In March, the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, set out plans to tackle uneven levels of funding, saying that the current arrangements were 'outdated, inefficient and unfair'. As an example of the current funding anomalies, she said that schools with similar levels of challenges in Plymouth received £500 less per pupil than a school in Rotherham.

Mrs Morgan's timetable promised a national funding formula to be introduced in stages from 2017.

There was also a political dimension to the changes, with funding to go directly to schools or to academy chains, cutting out the role currently played by local authorities.

The proposals would mean that all schools would receive a nationally-agreed basic level of support for each pupil. This would then be topped up on the basis of three other criteria:



Nicky Morgan called current funding arrangements 'outdated, inefficient and unfair' regarding deprived areas

additional pupil needs, such as deprivation; extra school costs, such as those serving sparsely-populated rural areas; and 'geographic costs', such as higher costs in London.

Having put forward the big picture there remained the important question of detail. How much of the budget would be a core amount – and how much would be for additional needs? How would these additional needs be weighted? Would the location, rural, urban or suburban, make a bigger impact on funding than the levels of deprivation?

Such a formula, applied to all schools, will mean winners and losers. If there are unsustainably big cuts for some schools it raises the question of what transitional support could be offered.

School leaders waited to find out what the funding changes would mean. They wanted clarity so they could plan ahead. It would have implications for their staffing which represents the biggest slice of their budgets.

Realistically, such an announcement, with bad news and good news for local schools, had to wait for a break in the political weather. It was unlikely to appear before local elections had





Department  
for Education,  
Sanctuary Buildings,  
Westminster

been completed, or during the EU referendum campaign. When that was followed by the resignation of David Cameron and a Conservative leadership election, headteachers' leaders began

to be concerned that once again a standardised funding formula could slip away.

Justine Greening had barely got through the door of the Department for Education, when the headteachers' unions were asking for answers on what was happening and whether the plans were still going ahead.

They received part of the answer on the final day before Parliament finished for its summer break. The new Education Secretary said that she was still committed to a national funding formula but that its introduction was going to be delayed by another year. It would not be implemented until 2018–19.

'This is a once in a generation opportunity for an historic change and we must get our approach right,' said Ms Greening.

## The battle over term-time holidays becomes a courtroom drama

This has been the dispute that refuses to go away, dividing parents, schools and even legal opinion. What should be the response of schools to parents who take their children on term-time holidays?

The Department for Education has been unambiguous about this 'Children should not be taken out of school without good reason'. Missing lessons means pupils falling behind, ministers have argued, and a family holiday during term-time is not acceptable; this tough stance has been backed by rising numbers of penalty fines. Official figures showed that more than 150,000 penalty notices for pupil absenteeism were issued to parents in England last year, an annual increase of more than 50%.

There was far from widespread agreement on this. There were parents who said that they could not afford the inflated cost of travel during the school holidays. As such they had the choice of either never having a family holiday, or going in term-time and accept that they would have to pay a £60 fine.

They didn't really see this as truancy but rather as parents exercising their rights on behalf of their family. They might have made the calculation that even with a fine, the overall cost of a holiday remained lower.

One parent waged a legal challenge against the validity of the penalty system, questioning whether parents should really have to pay these fines. Jon Platt had refused to pay a fine of £120 to the Isle of Wight council for



taking his daughter on an unauthorised term-time holiday. In the High Court in May, Mr Platt won a legal challenge, with the court ruling that he had no case to answer. Even with a week's absence in term-time, the court deemed that overall the pupil had attended the school regularly.

When the court found in favour of Mr Platt, the Department for Education responded immediately to say that 'children's attendance is non-negotiable so we will now look to change the law'.

Ministers made it clear that, despite the court ruling, there would be no green light for such bargain term-time holidays or trips to family events. The Isle of Wight council has also been given the right to appeal against the decision, so this argument is going to rumble on through the courts in the next academic year.

Until the legal dispute is resolved, local authorities and schools will have to wait and see how they should enforce attendance rules. It's a dispute that sets the wishes of individual families against the wider collective needs of



Term-time holidays can cause children to fall behind in their learning

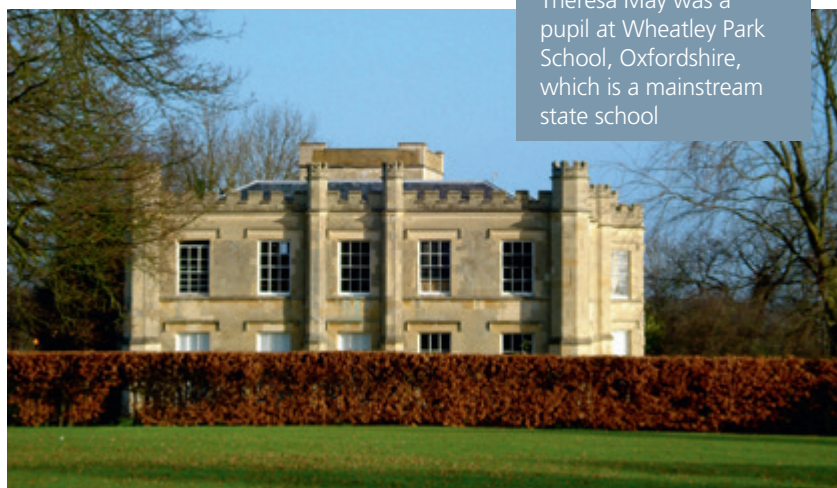
the school system. Parents might think in principle that they have the right to make a choice about whether their children should miss a week or a few days from school. On the other side of the argument, headteachers have warned about the disruption it causes, as teachers have to help children catch up when they return. They say that it would be impossible to organise a class if pupils are randomly taken out of school.

This is an argument that shows no sign of being settled.

## Independent schools gain pupils but lose members of the Cabinet

'The storm of the worst recession in living memory has passed,' said a private school headteacher as the independent sector, in more confident mood, announced buoyant figures in its annual census.

The Independent Schools Council has run an annual survey of pupil and school numbers since 1974 and it says that 2016 has been one of its best years. There are now 1,280 independent schools, the highest figure



Theresa May was a pupil at Wheatley Park School, Oxfordshire, which is a mainstream state school

in this century and the number of pupils has reached a new high of more than 518,000.

The independent school sector, relying on the spending power of parents, faced tough times during the recession but it now says that independent schools have recovered and are returning to expansion.

Independent schools, with an intake of overseas pupils, are particularly sensitive to the global economy; so the international nature of the recession as well as the pressure on family budgets added to their financial squeeze.

‘Having felt the pressures of worldwide recession in 2008, independent schools have adapted where necessary and are thriving just eight years on. It’s both heartening and reassuring to see the numbers of schools at such healthy levels,’ said the Independent Schools Council’s General Secretary, Julie Robinson.

The annual snapshot showed what now constitutes a typical private school pupil. Most are day pupils at co-educational schools, with the biggest concentration in London and the south east. Only a quarter of private schools are single sex and the proportion of boarders remains about 14%. The biggest numbers of overseas pupils are from China, Hong Kong and Russia.

The independent sector makes a big selling point of its exam results. Half of A-level grades and two thirds of GCSE grades achieved by independent school pupils were either A\* or A, far exceeding the national averages. When they finish their A-levels, 92% of private pupils go to university with 56% going to a Russell Group university.

Exam results remain very important to these fee-charging schools and independent school headteachers have been among the most dogged pursuers of any perceived problems with exam boards or individual qualifications.

Headteachers have loudly complained about what they see as the unreliability of some exam results and this year there were long-running arguments about the outcome of an English IGCSE exam.

Independent schools, as well as being sensitive to financial pressures, have faced questions about whether they are a barrier to social mobility. The other side of the disproportionate success of private school pupils in getting into top universities is that disadvantaged youngsters are under-represented in those universities.

There have been concerns about state school pupils not getting enough places in the most prestigious universities and there have been

The courtyard of Durham University, a member of the Russell Group



warnings that too many former private school pupils dominate the top roles in public life.

This came to the surface during the Cabinet reshuffle that followed Theresa May's success in the Conservative leadership campaign. Her choice of Education Secretary, Justine Greening, was hailed as a rare example of someone who would be responsible for state schools who actually had attended one herself. Ms Greening had gone to a comprehensive in Rotherham.

As the Cabinet took shape, the Sutton Trust education charity made the calculation that Mrs May's appointments had the lowest proportion of privately-educated

ministers since the post-war Cabinet of Clement Attlee in 1945.

In the new Cabinet appointed by Mrs May, there were 30% of ministers who had been taught privately, compared with 50% of David Cameron's Cabinet after the 2015 election and 62% in the coalition Cabinet in 2010. This meant that 70% of ministers in this new Cabinet were state-educated, either in comprehensives or grammar schools.

'Anyone should be able to become a minister, regardless of social background. It is good to see so many more comprehensive and grammar-educated cabinet ministers,' said the Sutton Trust chairman, Sir Peter Lampl.

## The first 'new' grammar school for 50 years gets the green light

After years of lobbying, argument and uncertainty, a new grammar school was finally approved in October 2015, the first such expansion in selective education in England for five decades.

Except that it wasn't technically a 'new' school.

The decision allowing the grammar school to open in Sevenoaks depended on this not being a newly-created institution. Instead the ruling accepted that this was an extension of an existing grammar school several miles away in Tonbridge.

Nevertheless the green light given to the Weald of Kent school to open in 2017 was seen as a symbolic triumph for the supporters of grammar schools. It suggested that the long retreat in grammars had ended and there could be a modest revival.

From a peak in the late 1950s, grammar schools declined in number



11-plus exams are still used for selection in the UK's 163 Grammar Schools

sharply through the 1960s and 1970s and remained at a stable but relatively small number through the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s.

There are currently 163 grammar schools, with no increase in the number because the school being opened is not counted as new but as an 'annexe' to an existing school.



The decision last year by the Education Secretary, Nicky Morgan, that the expansion in Kent could go ahead was hailed by grammar school supporters as a significant turning of the tide. Families who had campaigned for the grammar school in Sevenoaks welcomed the decision as a victory for 'parent power'; political reactions were divided.

Labour's Shadow Education Secretary criticised the decision to open another grammar school as a backwards step.

'They do not increase equality of opportunity, they make it worse,' said Labour's Lucy Powell, with accusations that grammars were too often the 'preserve of the privately tutored'.

On the Conservative backbenches, where there has been a longstanding traditional sympathy for the grammar school cause, there was a more enthusiastic welcome. Graham Brady, a long-time supporter of grammars, described it as a step which would give parents more options.

The advocates of grammar schools argued that this was a way to achieve greater social mobility, giving bright youngsters from disadvantaged families access to a high-quality education.

From the Government perspective the grammar school decision was a more difficult balancing act. Although ministers accepted the case for expansion in this case, there was a clear message that this would not open the way to a full-scale return of grammars.

The priority for the Government would be academies and free schools rather than going back to the 11-plus.

Alongside the ruling allowing the expansion of the grammar in Tonbridge was a reiteration that this did not mean any move towards allowing entirely new selective schools. The status quo established in the late 1990s which prevented the creation of new grammar schools remained in place.

Mrs Morgan said the plans in Tonbridge represented a 'genuine' expansion of an existing school. This was a technical ruling rather than a political shift.

'I don't think this will open any kind of precedent or floodgates,' said Mrs Morgan.

The change in leadership in the Conservative Party could give an extra impetus to grammar campaigners. Prime Minister, Theresa May, has been seen as being more sympathetic to allowing an expansion in grammar school places. Mr Brady has urged the Government to scrap the ban that currently outlaws the creation of entirely new grammar schools.

At the very beginning of her time as Education Secretary, Justine Greening was pressed on whether she would allow more grammar schools. She said that she remained 'open minded' and it's likely that she will face more questions on this until a clearer policy direction emerges.

## The population bulge that means secondary schools will have to keep building

When Justine Greening looked in her new in-tray at the Department for Education there would have been one topic that was an inescapable priority. There needs to be a substantial expansion in England's secondary

school places to keep pace with the rising birth rate and numbers of young people in that age group.

The most basic requirement of any government's education policy is to



New school building is finding its way through to secondary education

provide enough school places – and it's one of those tasks that no one will notice if it is achieved but will be a disaster if it is missed.

The scale of the extra demand was revealed in official projections published by the Department for Education, which showed there needed to be an additional 750,000 places by 2025. This represents a 10% increase in the number of pupils in the state school system.

The bulk of this extra demand will be for secondary schools, which will account for 570,000 of the 750,000 places that need to be created. The population bulge that had seen primary schools adding temporary classrooms and extensions is now going to work its way through to the secondary sector.

There might be some grounds for optimism in coping with this expansion, because the school system has already absorbed an extra 470,000 pupils since the primary school population began to rise in 2009. The increase in primary numbers is now slowing, although it will mean adding another 180,000 pupils before the numbers are expected to peak in five years.

This means that the Department for Education's planners will be working to see if the demands of rising numbers will be different for secondary schools compared with primary. It raises the

question of providing enough specialist teachers, when subjects such as science are already struggling to find enough suitably-qualified staff.

Secondary schools usually occupy bigger sites than primary but they also have more complex requirements and when it comes to GCSEs and A-levels, they need the space to be able to teach smaller groups of pupils.

Primary schools have so far managed to build enough extra capacity, with the average primary school having grown by the equivalent of another class in these years of rising pupil numbers.

Inevitably it will mean a sustained pressure on school places, with the projections suggesting that schools will have had 16 successive years of increasing numbers, adding more than 1.2 million pupils to the school population.

Whatever other ambitions education ministers might have, this basic issue of school capacity is going to cost time and money. The Department for Education says it has already committed £7bn to creating extra places and that keeping up with rising numbers is a 'top priority'.

Headteachers' leaders say that the pressures of this expansion will require better strategic planning, involving local authorities and with less emphasis on relying on the creation of free schools.



They also highlight the importance of making sure that there is an adequate pipeline of teachers being trained because extra classes will need extra teachers and support staff. Schools have been loudly warning about their current difficulties in recruiting teachers, particularly in shortage subjects such as science and modern languages.

'The Government will need to take teacher recruitment and retention more seriously,' said Russell Hobby, General Secretary of the National Association of Headteachers.

The Department for Education says that its record has so far been successful in providing places. Last year alone, schools took on an extra

121,000 pupils and the education department says this has not had an unduly negative impact on class size or school choice.

'The latest figures show that the system is responding well to growing numbers of pupils,' said a spokesperson at the Department for Education.

'Fewer children are being taught in large infant classes, the average primary school class size remain stable at 27.1 pupils and the vast majority of parents get places [for their children] in their preferred schools.'

The building boom that has seen primary schools filling up every space is going to be a feature of many secondary schools for the next decade.

## How Knowsley became a local authority where no schools offered A-levels

Knowsley, a local authority in the North West, became the centre of an unwanted exam story this year when the last secondary school in the borough offering A-levels decided to close its sixth form.

Halewood Academy's local decision and the prospect of an English authority

without any schools for pupils to take A-levels, raised national questions about the oversight of schools and how there could be a more joined-up approach in a school system that has become increasingly fragmented.

The school's decision to stop teaching A-levels was based on funding, arguing that it was no longer financially viable to maintain a sixth form.

This would have been no more than a local dispute but because it was the last school in the borough offering A-levels it meant that pupils in one of the country's most deprived boroughs would have to travel to schools in other neighbouring authorities if they wanted to take A-levels.

What added to the political complexity was that the school was an academy and not the responsibility of the local authority. The academy could take its individual decision without

There is nowhere in Knowsley for students to take A-Levels



any consideration to wider local or strategic consequences.

The local council expressed its concern but it was powerless to intervene. It seemed inconceivable that an entire inner-city local authority could be left with no A-levels on offer but that was indeed the decision.

Parents, who formed protest groups on social media, called for this last local sixth form to be saved. They complained vociferously about feeling excluded from the decision-making but they too could only look on as the academy trust pressed ahead with shutting down the sixth form.

It will mean that next year pupils from Knowsley who want to study A-levels and apply to university will have to compete for places in schools in other boroughs. A few years ago there were several schools offering A-levels in the borough, soon there will be none.

A majority of secondary schools in England are now academies and the Government's target is to see as many as possible acquiring academy status. The example of Knowsley highlighted that such an autonomous system can have unintended consequences. It also highlighted concerns about social mobility.

A major speech this year by Prime Minister, David Cameron, had called on leading universities to make greater efforts to ensure access to youngsters from poorer backgrounds and from ethnic minorities.

In the case of Knowsley it seemed that social mobility was going backwards, with young people not even being given the opportunity to take A-levels within their own borough. While much of the ambition and aspiration has been about widening access to higher



The end of A-Level exams may impact on university applications

education, in this case the barriers seemed to be raised.

Knowsley already has one of the lowest rates of university entry in the country and that, presumably, will not be advanced by the reduction in access to A-levels.

The coverage of this loss of A-levels certainly identified some problems and inconsistencies. After decades of political projects to raise education standards – and with Government plans currently promising ‘educational excellence everywhere’ – the reality on the ground seemed very different from the rhetoric.

Perhaps the most striking factor was the difficulty in making a response.

The local authority was a bystander without any control over a decision taken by an academy. The Department for Education and its regional schools commissioners seemed unlikely to change the sixth form funding rules for a single school.

After meetings between ministers, MPs and councillors, a statement emerged promising that they would find a way for A-levels to return to Knowsley – but who will teach them remains uncertain.

## Headteachers complain about problems with teacher shortages

There was one practical concern that was repeated again and again by secondary headteachers this year – the difficulty in recruiting teachers.

It was a concern that reached the House of Commons Education Select Committee and National Audit Office, as well as being debated wherever school leaders gathered.

Ofsted chief, Sir Michael Wilshaw, reflected the worries of headteachers, saying that recruitment difficulties were having a 'significant impact' on schools.

The National Audit Office reported that teacher recruitment targets had been missed for four years and that only about a quarter of physics lessons were likely to be taught by a teacher with a physics degree.

The National Association of Head Teachers said it had become a 'crisis' and that when school leaders advertised for teachers they often struggled to find the right staff and sometimes could not appoint anyone at all.

There were particular concerns from the secondary sector about the impact this could have on the quality of lessons, including for GCSE and A-level. Even if schools could find someone to put in front of a class they might not be specialists in the subject. Schools having to rely on a succession of temporary staff.

This was not a one-dimensional shortage. There were some subjects, such as maths and sciences, where it was particularly difficult to find appropriately-qualified teachers. It was also not a problem evenly spread across the country.

It could be harder to get good staff in coastal towns, which might find it hard to attract ambitious young graduates. It could also be difficult to keep staff in areas where house prices were so high that teachers could not afford to live. Low-achieving schools found it particularly hard to get staff with the suggestion that when teachers could pick and choose jobs, they might not opt for a school that was already struggling.

No matter how it showed itself, there was a problem. Professor John Howson, an expert on the teachers' employment market, said that the situation was the worst since 2001–02.

So what was causing this teacher shortage? A big underlying factor has been the wider recovery in the jobs market. There is a well-established pattern that during a recession more people go into more secure jobs, such as teaching.

When the recession finishes and there is more competition for graduates it becomes harder to attract people

Young people are uncertain about a career in teaching





into teaching. For maths and science graduates, this means that teacher training has to compete with the lure of the banks, financial services and hi-tech industries.

If the wider jobs market puts pressure on the supply of teachers, there was another big factor shaping the demand. There has been a population boom in the school-age population, affecting both secondary and primary levels, which means even more teachers are needed for the rising number of additional classrooms.

With such a surge in pupil numbers, more teachers would be needed just to stand still.

The teachers' unions argued that another factor was that schools were now so overburdened with bureaucracy that teachers were leaving the profession, so that as well as problems with recruitment schools could also struggle with retention.

When the National Foundation for Educational Research investigated the teacher shortage, it found that the extra demand for rising pupil numbers was a key factor and that the numbers leaving teaching had remained broadly constant.

There were also suggestions that the changes in how teachers are trained could contribute to creating recruitment cold-spots. The emphasis has shifted away from university education departments to a more localised pattern of training teachers in schools.

The Government accepted that schools faced difficulties but warned against 'talking down the profession' in the process.

The Department for Education could also point out that teacher numbers were not falling but were at an all-time high.

Ministers launched a renewed bid to attract even more applications



Influences from Asian school systems have been considered when it comes to teacher placements

to teaching. There was a television advertising campaign, emphasising the financial gain as well as the personal fulfilment of a career in teaching.

There were increases too in the level of cash incentives to enter teaching. A physics graduate with a first class degree could receive £30,000 tax free and those with an upper second degree could receive £25,000. There were also cash offers in other shortage subjects, such as modern languages and maths.

This year also saw the beginning of the pilot stage of the National Teaching Service. This has been an attempt to find a way to match high-quality teachers with the schools that need them most. This idea of putting the best teachers in the toughest schools has been a characteristic of successful Asian school systems such as in Shanghai. The aim is to develop a pool of teachers who can be deployed to struggling schools or to areas which find it hard to recruit.

As the education select committee observed, there was a political difference of opinion about language, whether the recruitment problems should be seen as a 'challenge' or a 'crisis'.

However it is labelled, finding the right teachers remains a serious concern for schools.

# Nunnery Wood High School



Nunnery Students in China



Stephen Powell, Headteacher

When I was appointed as headteacher 18 months ago, the question was, "How do I make students, staff and parents aware of how successful we are, without our becoming complacent?" Nunnery Wood High School had a long established reputation for excellent results and behaviour. Nationally, our progress scores placed us amongst the top few schools in the country. Consequently we were oversubscribed. There was a modesty to the school which was commendable but I wanted us spoken of in terms of innovation, energy and ambition. Simply conveying the vast range of events taking that happen as part of our school life would, to a degree, achieve this. When it came to creating a strong self-image however, I aspired to something more.

Too often, I believe, publicity focusses on future parents and bypasses the most effective advocates any school can have: its students and staff. Also, parents need to feel that our communication with the outside world was a true reflection of the school and not a glossy and censored version of reality.

## Positive first steps

My immediate step was to create an opportunity for a positive initial message. By surveying a third of our parents we scored on average 97% satisfaction ratings for student happiness, trust in the leadership of the school and quality of teaching. This gave me a wonderful start to create the image I had in mind and to thank parents

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Stephen Powell
- » Nunnery Wood High School is in Worcester City.
- » 1320 students and 150 staff.
- » Broadly national average for Pupil Premium.
- » Ability on intake in line with national average (27.6)
- » Outcomes:
 

Progress 8	0.46
Best 8	1028
Best 8 Pupil Premium	1014



In the top 10% for  
Value Added



for their support. This evidence was used alongside other strong indicators of high performance to give a boost to staff morale and to reinforce parents' trust in us.

### Staffing

To improve communication, I needed the right people in the right posts. I appointed an excellent senior leader to an "Events and Communication" role while a new-media brief was given to an existing member of our gifted Systems team.

Although highly effective, our website needed to be brighter, clearer and more in line with modern branding. As a leadership team, we pored over the best models from business and education and defined a model that married functionality with image. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram were linked in.

The next major development might appear counter intuitive in a school seeking to update its image: the creation of a student led newspaper. "Nunnery News" is a million miles from the amateur student newspaper of the past. Published six times per year, comprising 20 or so pages of news,

reviews and celebrations, it gives the school a fighting chance to capture the vast array of activities that go on. The senior leader focussing on Events and Communication coordinates each publication which is in high resolution colour and externally printed. I was keen that students saw their writing, art and photography presented in a highly professional context. In fact, the quality of the publication is such that it will be kept as a souvenir for students writing for it, or featuring in it. This was the primary aim. A secondary aim was to create a powerful marketing vehicle for the school that spoke of our ambitions, professionalism and opportunities; something that could be viewed by prospective parents as a window into life at Nunnery. It features also as an e-edition on our website where it has been viewed several thousand times to date.

Beyond the revamped website, Nunnery News and an internal team dedicated to communication, students are recipients of this communication through assemblies, wall-mounted TV screens and tutor periods in which Nunnery News is shared. Schools are insular places; my assemblies frequently refer to the presence of the school in the community and

“...a school culture through which the personal development of pupils thrives...”



"Disco Inferno"

media – partly to engender pride in our many achievements, but also to raise awareness of the world at large in which students will soon play a major part. They are told, on a regular basis, that they are part of something special and that they should be proud of this as well as accepting that they have a responsibility to play their part.

### How did we measure impact?

Within a year of my headship, there is impact. For any school, admission numbers are critical. Communication only promotes an organisation if the message is positive and thanks to our superb staff and students, we've had a constant stream of good news to share. Also, the school is promoted conventionally through, for example, open evenings and mornings. Parents naming us as their first preference are up significantly on last year's figures. I believe that a revived public image and sense of self-belief has helped with this enormously.

Certainly during a recent Ofsted inspection, we achieved a second day of inspection and narrowly missed "Outstanding". The website and

Nunnery News gave us a chance to offer a glimpse into the packed life of a student at the school and an insight into the huge range of visits, trips and events that go on. Conveying the ongoing life of the school beyond what can be witnessed during two days of inspection is notoriously difficult task for all headteachers. Nunnery News was effective and memorable enough to get its own mention in the final Ofsted as a, "high quality, student led publication." The Ofsted report's first line was, "Leaders and governors have established a school culture through which the personal development of pupils thrives and academic success is cultivated." Again, the speed with which a sense of our ethos could be communicated through Nunnery News and other vehicles helped the hard work of staff, intense preparation of school leaders and enthusiasm of the students shine through in inspection.

The day to day business of Nunnery Wood High School is the business of learning and building futures. We are developing a public voice that tells the world how well we do in that business.

“established a school culture through which the personal development of pupils thrives”

# Ormiston Sheffield Community Academy



Principal Paula Arrowsmith describes the academy's dramatic turnaround in less than 18 months – one of the quickest ever achieved.



In September 2013 I was appointed to my first headship role at Sheffield Community Academy. Barely four months later, the academy was placed in Special Measures. The key areas of weakness identified by Ofsted were leadership including governance, mathematics, and the quality of learning and teaching. I knew that no one person could singlehandedly lift the school out of special measures – it would be the actions of a focused team working together towards a common goal to improve outcomes and provision for young people. Fortunately, the staff, students and parents, all pulled together and Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT) provided the academy with a new Interim Executive Board in September 2014 before taking on a more formal role as sponsor.

## REPORT CARD

- » Principal: Paula Arrowsmith
- » School: Ormiston Sheffield Community Academy
- » Sponsor: Ormiston Academies Trust (OAT)
- » Location: Walsall, West Midlands
- » Number of Students: 1316
- » Number of Staff: 206
- » Percentage of Pupil Premium Students: 47%
- » Percentage of students with SEN: 20%
- » Ofsted Rating: Good

## How did we achieve this transformation?

Our academy values, created early into my appointment and developed with students and staff, have never been more apt. Our values are: Aspiration; Responsibility; Positivity and Achievement. Special Measures required all of us to have high aspirations and expectations, of ourselves and our students; it required all staff to take responsibility for the situation we found ourselves in, without attributing blame. It required a team spirit, for problems to be treated as a challenge and an unrelenting focus on raising and praising student achievements.

## Leadership

The first priority was key changes to systems and structures. This included a renewed focus on our values of Aspiration and Achievement and the introduction of some new leadership roles to make change happen. We began by making academy targets more challenging ensuring that students and staff were aiming higher in terms of achievement. Several leaders at local schools and OAT schools were keen to support us and staff visited high achieving schools at both secondary and primary level which helped give a renewed focus in terms of what was possible and what could be achieved.



The changes to governance, brought about by OAT's sponsorship, included a progress board and an Interim Executive Board, rigorously monitoring progress against academy targets, providing challenge and support as well as reviewing our half termly 'impact statements' linked closely to the Ofsted priorities for improvement.

We invested heavily in middle leadership, in our curriculum and pastoral leaders, and created a real sense of team through annual residential training sessions with the senior leadership team. We focused not just on systems, but on how to create a positive culture within teams, focusing on how to keep staff feeling positive and motivated whilst asking more of them and leading them through a period of rapid change.

In order to lead some of the changes ahead we created some new key posts within the academy all focusing on raising aspirations, improving learning and teaching and creating an achievement culture:

- » Non-Teaching posts of Aspirations Leader and Community Engagement Coordinator.
- » Lead teachers – Outstanding teachers within the academy who work supportively with other teachers to improve performance.

### Learning and Teaching

The priority, of course, was developing better learning and teaching in order to improve student performance. Our uncompromising drive to improve learning and teaching, included several elements. Staff were on board with the changes that needed to be made. Training plans were introduced for teachers but with a view point that everyone could improve their teaching. With around 40% of our teaching that was not good, we needed to support one another to ensure we achieved a consistent high quality. The message was clear, do not feel you are not responsible for special measures if your own teaching is good or your own classes get great results. We are a team and anyone who is in that positive position should be reaching out and helping those who need support to join them. Our strategy was rigorous but never ruthless.

Nevertheless, some staff felt that the renewed focus and high expectations meant that the school was no longer for them. Around a quarter of our teaching

“...do not feel you are not responsible for special measures if your own teaching is good or your own classes get great results.”

- » A Senior Vice-Principal post focusing on behaviour for learning, but also on staff and student well-being.
- » Two new Vice-Principal posts focusing specifically on learning and teaching and student achievement, with a specific focus on special educational needs, pupil premium and more able, gifted and talented students.
- » New Assistant Principal posts focusing on numeracy and mathematics; Student leadership and developing a praise culture; Literacy across the curriculum.
- » Student Achievement posts in English, Maths and Science departments focusing on: Key stages 3, 4 and 5, as well as the achievement of more able, gifted and talented students and pupil premium students.
- » Specific teaching leadership posts for more able, gifted and talented; Student leadership; Curriculum enrichment and broadening horizons.

6th Formers meeting Nick Gibb MP





Rewards & Recognition  
Evening

## » CULTURE

The key factor to the academy's successful transformation has been our ability to create a positive culture. Staff and student welfare has been a priority. We have never forgotten to celebrate success, whether that be student successes in special assemblies or rewards and recognition events, or applauding staff success in our weekly Feel Good Friday briefings where staff leave the theatre having seen some great examples of good practice, shared some positive news about the talented young people they work with or have simply shared laughter – often the best tonic. This focus on valuing qualities as well as qualifications, on valuing people as the key to improvement has been what has made the difference for Shelfield. Working with staff, students, parents and governors who have put their heart and soul into making the change happen has been a very humbling experience!

staff moved on to pastures new, allowing us to recruit some new high quality teachers and leaders who wanted to be part of our improvement journey.

We invited outstanding teachers to become 'lead teachers' who could coach and support those who needed to improve. High quality training sessions were led by our own staff and focused on key areas of teaching such as questioning, planning for students' specific learning needs, developing writing and oracy.

Members of the Senior Leadership Team visited lessons every hour, supporting staff as well as upholding the belief that 'checking makes the system work'. Our quality assurance systems were developed and are constantly evolving through staff feedback; the quality assurance calendar was revised and we introduced more regular quality assurance with the aim of achieving constant improvement. The aim is always that the checking leads to improvements or praise and sharing best practice.

### Clarity of Expectation

Clarity of expectation for staff is key when in Special Measures. Staff need to be part of the development process, but they do need clear direction, as well as support in meeting those expectations. Working parties helped to come up with new expectations for planning, teaching and assessment and expectations were regularly revisited through CPD sessions and morning briefings.

Redeveloping the appraisal process and ensuring that this was fairly linked to performance related pay was also a priority in terms of development of learning and teaching. The policy was rewritten, applied fairly and clearly linked to the teacher standards and to student outcomes.

This clarity is also key for students. Behaviour at Shelfield remained good, even during our Special Measures inspection, but we felt that we

needed a focus on learning behaviour, in particular developing students' understanding of what good learning looks like as well as a general focus on standards of behaviour including uniform, punctuality, effort and quality of students' work. This helped to ensure that students understood their part within the academy's transformation.

### Curriculum

Whilst the academy had always had a reputation for its work with future technologies a decision was made to move away from ICT-based learning to a more traditional curriculum with an emphasis on key skills, such as improving extended writing. The whole curriculum was reviewed at KS4 ensuring that more personalised pathways were in place. There was a concern that more able students were not being sufficiently challenged by a curriculum that focused heavily on vocational subjects and allowed early entry to secure C grades. Therefore the curriculum was reviewed to move away from vocational qualifications to more traditional GCSEs where appropriate, ensuring students were no longer entered early for exams and had the best chance possible of gaining the grades they were capable of.

A significant focus has been on ensuring the curriculum allows for the development of qualities and not just qualifications in our young people. In order to develop our academy values and particularly those of aspiration and achievement we have developed a curriculum which offers a wider range of enrichment opportunities for all young people, broadening their horizons and motivating them to achieve. Our partnership with the social enterprise group Human Utopia where students focus on developing self-esteem, and become leaders themselves is helping students to realise that they can 'be the change' at the academy and are key to our journey of improvement.



# Broadway Academy



Broadway Sixth-formers, planning their routes for the Duke of Edinburgh Award, Silver Expedition



Mr Skelton, Headteacher and Mr Yousif Zaman, Chairman of the Broadway Mosque

Our Ofsted inspection earlier this year reported that “The leadership team has developed and enhanced the good quality of education in the school since your predecessors school’s last inspection. Parents, members of the local community, pupils, staff and governors fully believe in your motto ‘Our children, Our community, believe it can be done!’” But it has not always been like that. As a large comprehensive school, we have had a long journey to raise the aspirations of all our stakeholders to this level.

Mr Skelton spoke to 1500 members of the community before Friday prayers at the Mosque. He discussed the importance of parents working with their children in relation to the three F’s: to be Firm, Fair and Friendly.

Before I became Headteacher at Broadway in September 2008, the school had never achieved an Ofsted better than ‘requires improvement’. Staff morale was low. As a school where the majority of students are Pakistani and Bangladeshi with a sizeable minority of black and Indian students, there were low expectations – not just among staff but among students and parents as well. So raising aspirations was and still continues to be our key focus.

In 2011, four months before another Ofsted we merged two campuses at Broadway and Aston into an impressive £21 million campus. At the time we moved we had 800 students working in portacabins. It was a mammoth task to merge two schools into one and yet in these difficult circumstances Ofsted reported that we were on the way to being an ‘outstanding school’.

In 2013 we made the decision to become an Academy, which gave us the opportunity to do more for the local community, to raise aspirations further and to fulfil our ambitions to become an excellent provider of education in the city.

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Mr. Ron Skelton
- » Academy: Broadway Academy Birmingham
- » Number of students: 1200
- » Number of staff: 161
- » 25.8% free school meals
- » 33% special educational needs
- » Ofsted rating: Good

» STUDENT  
ETHNIC MAKE-UP

Bangladeshi	33.11%
Indian	9.45%
Pakistani	46.49%
Asian (Other)	0.75%
Black (Other)	1.92%
Somalian	3.26%
Other	2.84%
Mixed Race	1.00%
White	1.17%



The students are watering peas and adjusting the netting support for the peas to grow up. The students are learning planting and horticulture skills through the Health for Life project which promotes healthy eating, exercise and the understanding of growing through to cooking their school grown produce

There have been many challenges over time to change the culture and ethos of Broadway. Our vision and ethos emanate from our shared values across the whole community; a community that has diverse cultures and faiths.

We have won many awards, despite the proportion of students eligible for free school meals and the proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities being well above the national average. In 2010, Broadway was recognised by the Department for Education as one of the most improved 100 schools nationally and in 2012, we received an outstanding achievement in ICT from Ofsted.

We have also achieved many prestigious awards for our international work – receiving the International Schools Award, Citizenship Award and Centre of Excellence for Community Cohesion. Alongside the school's significant academic achievements has been our outstanding success on the sports field. We offer a rich, varied and hugely successful extra-curricular programme which includes cricket, rounders, judo, boxing, basketball and football. We have a weekly newsletter promoting our students achievements and an annual musical theatre production from our drama students.

It is a constant challenge to raise the aspirations of our students, almost all of whom are from minority ethnic backgrounds and speak English as an additional language, we embarked upon the Duke of Edinburgh award and we are now the second highest provider in the City. All students receive free boots and camping equipment. The award has developed students' morals and character. All this adds to the confidence of pupils and staff and enhances the school's role in the regeneration of the community.

The local community is a major part of our raising aspirations ethos. We serve

an area of significant social and economic disadvantage where knife and gun crime are prevalent. We do not tolerate community crime coming through our school doors. This has been a factor in achieving good behaviour. In 2009 we bid for £3.2m from 'New Deal for Communities' to establish a local police station and a community facility within the school building. Our Chair of Governors, a Police Constable with 29 years of service is very well-known in the community and we have found working with the police and dealing with problems as soon as they arise have been a huge help to good behaviour. Ofsted commented on our effective systems for monitoring behaviour and attendance.

We have developed a busy and thriving community centre to address the needs of our students and the wider community. We are seen as a safe haven for the community with 60,000 people using the facility annually for sport, faith events, political groups and adult education.

We have engaged more effectively with local business which has helped to improve opportunities for our students. We have strong strategic links with the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce and we are currently looking at the potential to establish an Alternative Provision free school in partnership with the Sports Hub which recently received the Queens Award for Volunteering.

Faith is a strong underlying current in our school, as it is in many Birmingham schools. The majority of our students have a Muslim faith. Rather than seeing faith as a means of dividing the community, we seek to create inter-faith activities to bring the community and the school together. Our vision is to become a national leader and ambassador for inter-faith dialogue. In teaching Religious Education we draw on the 2007 Birmingham



Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education based on 24 character developing dispositions. We have shared our expertise in delivering RE and 'Collective Worship' with schools nationally and also in the House of Commons.

No matter what religion our students have, we encourage them to aspire to a common set of values which underpin everything we do. Our immediate plan, developed out of many years of inter-faith and community work at Broadway, is to set up a regional centre for Theology and Community Cohesion. In September this year we will begin to recruit, as part of a three year plan to accommodate 100 sixth form theology students. Our ultimate aim is to become a Centre of Excellence for Theology with recommendations from Mosques, Churches and Temples, with which we already have strong connections.

Our vision is to be a school with a society of individual and collective achievement where deprivation is never a barrier to success.

We are developing the culture of homework and that means understanding the home circumstances of our students. Many do not have internet access and no quiet space at home to work, so we have extended the times of school opening hours so that students can use our facilities to do homework after school and at weekends.

This year, two of our students have been interviewed for Oxford and Cambridge Universities and many attend 'red brick' universities. Professor Arnall at Birmingham University (Law) said of one girl "I thought she was absolutely excellent: well informed, highly articulate and mentally agile with the right combination of calmness and confidence in her own views. I reckon she has a decent chance of getting into



Year seven student hits another four as Broadway make their way into the quarter finals of the Birmingham Cup. The U13 and U14 teams are also in the quarter finals, defending the titles they won last year.

Oxford. I see she has also applied to us. We would be delighted to have her".

Our 2016 Ofsted report states that we are "a school with collective values that responds well to change and is proactively inclusive".

But we don't stand still. We continually monitor using annual surveys from parents and students. Our quality of learning and teaching continues to be systematically reviewed and evaluated.

Our motto – our children, our community, believe it can be done – defines everything we do and sets out our future strategic vision. It is our ambition to be the best school in the country for student progress by 2020.

Year 10 student tackles the ball at a match between Aston under 15 and Coventry



Year 9 student receives player of the tournament award



# Cromwell Community College



Weekly assemblies are held for all pupils



Principal, Jane Horn, with pupils. Student voice is strong at Cromwell

## REPORT CARD

- » Principal: Mrs Jane Horn
- » Location: Cromwell Community College is a larger than average Comprehensive school in Chatteris, located in the Fens of North Cambridgeshire
- » It became a stand-alone 11-18 converter academy in 2012
- » Number on roll is approximately 1150 with a rapidly growing Post 16 provision. There are approximately 75 teaching staff with 90 support staff
- » 25% of students are pupil premium
- » There are a greater than average number of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Pupil attainment at the beginning of Year 7 is below the national average. The proportion of pupils who are judged as “low” on entry is greater than the national average for every year group. Additionally the proportion of “high attainers” is below than national average for every year group.

Building Schools for the Future funding allowed £11million refurbishment and redevelopment in 2012. The impact of improving the learning environment for pupils cannot be underestimated. Pupils respect their College; visitors frequently comment on how tidy the site is, particularly on the lack of litter.

The College was sitting on a “Good” judgement when the new Principal began in September 2014. The school was revisited in February 2015 and was judged to Require Improvement. It was a disappointing outcome but only for a very short time. It did not take long for the Principal, Governors and many other leaders in the school to recognise this as an opportunity to drive the College forward. The Requires Improvement judgement gave the remit to continue the work which had begun at the start of the academic year. That inspection validated the existing action plan and gave absolute credence to both the direction in which the College had already begun to move, and to the work of the leadership team.

The College has continued to improve rapidly since. There have been a number of changes, including a significant number of staffing changes; including several at middle leadership level. The improvements are built on clear principles:

### Simplicity – teachers just need to teach

The key message is that our job is to educate young people. We have exposed the core purpose and stripped away the distractions which we, as teachers can



be burdened with. Following the introduction of an innovative strategy to quality assure the teaching and learning in the College, standards have risen and quickly become more consistent. We did away with the traditional lesson observation schedule; and staff agreed that it was too easy to perform well on an isolated observation. Instead, we have built a programme based on triangulation of learning to judge teaching effectiveness.

There are now short learning walks, alongside focussed work scrutiny and pupil voice meetings conducted by staff at all leadership levels. This has removed the stress of preparing for a formal lesson observation by senior leaders and facilitated more positive conversations with staff to celebrate what they are achieving. It also provides a more realistic view of what is happening in the classroom on a daily basis.

However, simplicity should not be mistaken for ease. The reality is that expectations have risen considerably and led to a much greater focus on pedagogy and sharing of good practice. A one size fits all approach does not work across a curriculum

of many subjects and age ranges of 11-18; therefore the monitoring and support is geared towards the specific needs and identified weaknesses of all staff. This approach towards both teaching practice and quality assurance has hugely increased our capacity to support staff and to hold them to account.

When pupils are reporting to senior leaders and external visiting educationalists about the effort teachers are putting into preparing and assessing their learning, the impact is clear to see. This was particularly visible with the improvements in Post 16 outcomes. In 2014 the majority of key indicators were below national average figures, but by 2015 most headline figures were either at or above national average figures.

### Purpose and leadership

The College has worked hard to develop a system of leadership in which there is shared ambition, founded on trust and accountability. These two symbiotic factors are the key to delivering improvement. All staff understand and accept their responsibilities, and this has led to a common vision for the College.

“Simplicity should not be mistaken for ease”



The Resource Centre is widely used by pupils of all ranges

There is rapid growth of Cromwell Sixth Form



“Governors, leaders, staff, pupils and parents are all involved in the life of the College”

Logical structures and processes have been introduced so that expectations at all levels are very clear. Faculty leaders are encouraged to adapt processes to ensure they are fit for their purpose in specific curriculum areas, leading to greater acceptance by staff. However, along with this level of autonomy, comes increased accountability for staff, particularly middle leaders. An example is the introduction of new assessment policies. Firstly, the purpose of marking was established. Staff agreed that the point of marking had to be to improve pupil learning, not just to demonstrate to senior leaders or OfSTED that books were marked. Faculty leaders were asked to write policies for their areas based on the requirements of their subjects. This has meant that there is no dictat regarding the regularity of marking or a particular format; subjects provide feedback in a fashion which is pertinent to them. This approach has had tremendous impact. Pupils regularly recognise the quality of feedback they receive because it is concrete and clearly shows them how to improve.

### Sense of community

The College flourishes due to the commitment of all stake holders. Governors, leaders, staff, pupils and

parents are all involved in the life of the College. There is tremendous pride in the positive relationships and the very inclusive nature of the school. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to the success of the College. A strong focus on student voice has led to a deeper sense of belonging. Involvement in improvement has encouraged pupils to take pride in their school and it is viewed in the most positive light. During a visit from an external guest, a group of pupils were asked one lunchtime to “dish the dirt on the College and tell him what it was really like.” He was met with the response that there was nothing wrong with the College and that “Cromwell was loyal to them, so they were loyal to Cromwell.” There have been countless occasions where pupils have responded in a similar fashion.

This reciprocal loyalty is matched with a common courtesy where staff encourage the students to engage and interact. For example, members of the senior leadership team, including the Principal, are visibly on duty every break and lunchtime. The modelling of such positive behaviour has an influence on pupils which is hard to overestimate.

# Kesteven & Grantham Girls' School



The facilities in school encourage us to work as hard as we can. We enjoy our lessons because the teachers are supportive and encouraging



David Scott, Headteacher

**H**ave you heard about the school that won the Under15 English Schools' Girls' Water Polo Championships two years running but doesn't have a swimming pool? Well, that's Kesteven & Grantham Girls' School (KGGS). It typifies its students' belief that just about anything is possible if you are truly determined to achieve it.

## Our students are inspired

Graded outstanding by Ofsted in 2011, we are totally committed to maintaining this status. KGGS is a school full of very able girls. What makes it special is that students, typically, achieve over half a grade higher in their GCSEs than would be expected, using national data. This places us in the top 7% of schools for value-added.

We celebrate the successes of our current students within school, knowing that they will inspire each other. The school's motto in Latin is "Veras hinc ducere voces" which effectively translates as "From this place draw true inspiration". The school numbers amongst its former students Britain's first female Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, an achievement of which we are proud, but it is photographs of successful current students that adorn our corridors. As they go about their day, girls see their peers pictured in national athletics, water polo, rugby, triathlon, Bar Mock Trial and Bank of England competitions and they believe that it really "could be me".

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: David Scott
- » 11-18 state selective girls' school
- » Location: Grantham, Lincolnshire
- » Founded 1910, converted to academy 2012
- » 1200 students with 320 in sixth form
- » Ofsted Grading: Outstanding



“The outstanding curriculum is extremely well matched to students’ preferences and ambitions. It is one of the reasons why examination success is so high”  
Ofsted 2011

## Our students are challenged

Whilst having a consistent record of academic excellence at the highest levels, we also recognise our duty to develop the whole person.

Staff continually strive to bring out the best in the girls, both academically and through a range of extra-curricular activities. We have exchange programmes with French, German, Spanish and Japanese schools, regular Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, involving over 100 students and music and drama productions throughout the year. Many students participate in sport at county, regional, national and some at international level.

## A curriculum for the students

Very bright girls kept very busy doing subjects they have chosen is our recipe for success. We mould our curriculum offer around our students whilst maintaining a strong emphasis on Mathematics, English and Science. Students pursue Humanities, Arts, Languages and Technology as ambition and interest dictates.

All KS4 students study three separate sciences and are encouraged to study a foreign language. We devote a great deal of time to ensuring that students are given relevant advice for GCSE

Unusually, for a girls’ school, over half of our Y12 students take Mathematics and 60% will opt for at least one science



Creative Arts feature prominently at KGS



and A-Level options and match our staffing accordingly. We aren’t moved to change with every national initiative but believe in a foundation of academic subjects for our students.

On becoming an academy in 2012 we asked “What can we do that will benefit our students further?” – we were successful with our capital bid to part-fund a Creative and Expressive Arts block and a Sixth Form Study Centre, costing £1.2million. We strongly value the contribution of the Arts to the development of young people and Creative Arts feature prominently in school life, with performances at Shakespeare festivals, a concert tour to Ireland and Art study trips to Venice amongst the opportunities offered.

## A school community with a family feel

Expectations in terms of motivation, determination and achievement are high and our students’ ability and enthusiasm for life is impressive and evident throughout the school. Students at KGS enjoy being part of this school community and embrace an ethos which encourages and values collaboration and support. We understand and celebrate the contribution that an individual can make towards the success of others. Academic mentoring schemes are popular, with most sixth formers paired with younger students.

At the heart of the life of the school is its House system. Organised and maintained by the Sixth Form, this is a wonderful vehicle for encouraging collaboration across the year groups. It provides positions of responsibility for Sixth Form students who support many activities and competitions. Our Head Girls, House Captains and House Secretaries, all of whom are elected by the students, form a highly regarded and cohesive group.



The end of each term sees House Pantomime, Choir Competition or Sports Day; watched by the whole school and produced and presented by the students themselves, it is brilliant entertainment and an invaluable opportunity for our students to develop a range of extracurricular skills.

Our School Council provides students with opportunities to influence the development of their school and prepares them for participation as active citizens in a democratic society. Two representatives from each year group are elected to serve on the School Council for a full academic year. Chaired by the Head Girls with the Headteacher, a Governor and Deputy Headteacher also attending, meetings allow students to discuss whole-school issues and communicate their views, concerns and suggestions for improvements.

Students are encouraged to look beyond themselves and support local and national charities. Each form elects representatives to the school Charities Committee, which decides the term's charity. Forms also organise events to support their chosen charities or respond to specific appeals. Students typically raise £12,000 in a year and, in 2011 sent £4,700 to Fukushima, Japan, following the tsunami and nuclear disaster.

We are committed to providing healthy and nutritious food and were proud to be awarded the DfE Secondary School Food Achievement Award in 2015.

Behaviour is excellent throughout all year groups because our shared expectations are high and the students see KGGS as their school. The House-based form groups have close relationships with their tutors and Heads of Year so that, even in a large school, everyone feels valued and cared for.

## Our students achieve

The academic achievement of our students is our priority because we know that they deserve to develop the skills which will enable them to improve their life chances and to take their place in a society which increasingly seeks a wide skill set in those who are to shape the future. From the Headteacher down there is a relentless focus on motivating students to do their best. We share the target-setting process with our students, who then take real ownership of challenging academic goals.

By implementing a thorough approach to monitoring student progress in an honest, respectful and evidence-based environment, all teachers play their part in supporting students towards successful outcomes. Faculty Heads produce regular detailed reports on student achievements and progress which form the basis of in-depth discussions with the Headteacher, where success is celebrated and routes to further improvements are considered. With the new Progress 8 measure showing a score of 0.6 for KGGS this year, 75% of A-level grades at A\*/B and 95% of our Y13 students gaining places at their chosen university, we believe that KGGS is helping local girls to be inspired, to be challenged and to have achieved.



Sixth Formers and younger students enjoy working together

“This is our chance to work as a team with all the year groups in our Houses to compete against each other. The rivalry between us is great fun and brings the whole school together for each event”



# Parkside Community School



"Students are well cared for and kept safe" Ofsted June 2015



Parkside Community School  
Parliament 2016-2017

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher:  
Mrs Kam Grewal-Joy
- » Location: Chesterfield,  
Derbyshire
- » 11-16 LA Maintained School
- » 56% Pupil Premium
- » 25% special educational  
needs
- » 62% 5A\*-C including English  
and maths (2015)
- » 77% expected progress and  
38% exceed expected  
progress in English (2015)
- » 72% expected progress and  
35% exceed expected  
progress in maths (2015)

Parkside Community School is now benefiting from the huge changes made in the past three years. The school has made major improvements in all key measures, exceeding national averages and placing the school in the upper quartiles nationally across a number of areas. This academic achievement clearly challenged any negative perceptions which may have been held in the past by the local community due to the school's failure to meet the minimum standards expected of all secondary schools. The improvement journey which has resulted in the recent successes, has involved all stakeholders who have worked tirelessly to change the culture and ethos in the school. 2015 represented a real turning point for the school and an absolute validation of all the hard work.

## Teaching & Learning

Improvements in teaching and learning have been at the core of the significant changes introduced at Parkside over the past three years. The introduction of non-negotiables for teachers and learners have brought about big improvements in the classroom. This has resulted in better progress and a more consistent learning experience for students. The school has worked hard to create a culture where staff are willing to share and improve their practice with others. Termly good practice sessions and the school's Teaching Leaders are used to support, celebrate and strengthen teaching across all areas. This has been instrumental in reducing within school variation and providing children with a more consistently good or better learning experience.



## Marking & Feedback

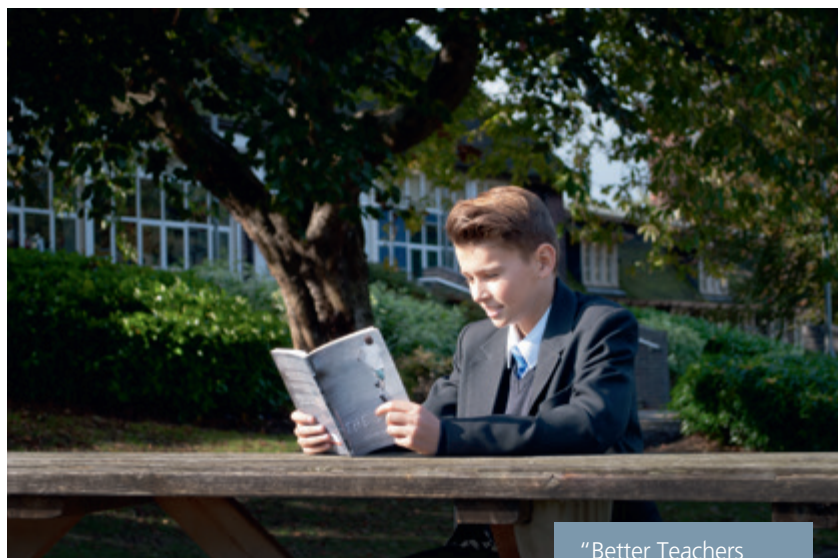
"Among the various means by which you have improved the quality of teaching, the use of MAD ('Make a Difference') time is motivating the pupils by helping them to understand what they have learned and how to improve, which has increased their self-confidence and their aspirations to do well." Ofsted 2015. A Teach, Review and Improve strategy has informed the way that teachers mark and give feedback to students. This has strengthened the dialogue between teachers and students. Its value and benefits are evident in the student responses and have led to an improved climate for learning. "Feedback from teachers identifies my mistakes, but then I always get the opportunity to make them right." Year 10 student.

## Leadership & Management

The clear and unequivocal drive and direction for improvement is now seen among leaders at all levels. Distributed leadership and shared accountability have been vital in securing and sustaining improvements. All leaders are required to be at least good in their own classroom so that they are able confidently to influence change and evaluate teaching and learning from observation and books. "I'm a big believer in walking the talk and leading by example. Leaders need to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities so that they are effective in improving the quality of provision in their respective areas." Kam Grewal-Joy, Headteacher

## Attendance

Attendance was one of the areas the school had to improve urgently, although at the time it seemed that all that could be done was being done: free breakfasts; rewards; inter-form competitions; attendance panels, just to name a few. The Parkside Pickup was introduced by



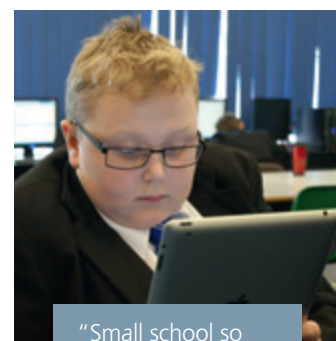
"Better Teachers  
– Better Teaching –  
Improved Progress"  
Ofsted June 2015

one of the Senior Leaders. The school minibus is sent out every morning to collect students at risk of not attending. The school's Community Liaison Officer, an ex-Police Officer deployed to run the Pickup has strengthened the school's existing work with the most hard to reach families resulting in improvements in overall attendance and a reduction in persistent absence rates.

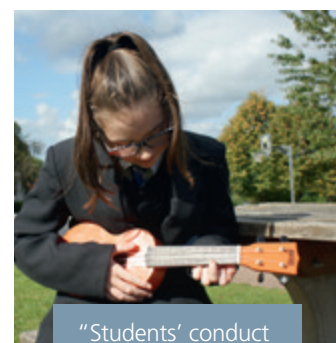
## Literacy

The school recognises that GCSE success is dependent on good literacy skills and has introduced a weekly stand-alone literacy lesson for all Key Stage 3 learners and a daily reading session for all year groups. Students at Parkside are now reading regularly and teachers have been effective in reviving children's interest in literature and books. It is not unusual to see Year 10 buddy readers listening to Year 7 students read first thing in a morning around the school.

Year 10 student said, "Being a peer reader is great, I have worked hard to build a relationship with Jack and he tells me if he's worried about something, I even help him with his homework sometimes." Similarly, Year 7 student agreed, "Peer reading really helps me. I can talk to Jordan about lots of things and I am a more confident reader. It is good to have someone who knows how to help me with my homework, because he has done it before."



"Small school so  
you know all the  
teachers" Student  
feedback



"Students' conduct  
around the school is  
good" Ofsted June  
2015

“From day one my guiding principle has been that every student at Parkside should be given the standard of education and treated with the respect, care and empathy I would want for my own children. I regularly invite staff to reflect on their practice and our provision on that basis too. It is a powerful message to give to all those who work at Parkside and this baseline helps to ensure that we maintain the high standards we set for ourselves.”

Kam Grewal-Joy, Headteacher

### Parkside Parliament

Student feedback has regularly been used to shape and evaluate policy at Parkside, especially at a time of great change and transition. In line with the General Election in 2014,

Parkside students also went to the ballot box to vote for their members of School Parliament with the best election campaigns and manifestos. The Parliament was created to provide students with opportunities to exercise responsibility, develop leadership skills and contribute to the life of the school. They are now a driving force in the school; willing to give their views to staff and Governors alike. They are managed by the Headteacher as they hold a leadership position in school and are regularly seen in the school canteen gathering the opinions of students on matters which concern them to bring to their monthly Parliament meeting.

“We are the future of Parkside and I will do my best to represent the views and wishes of my fellow students. I have already thrown myself into school life achieving a Librarian position. This role allows me to communicate with students of all ages; which is one of my strengths that I bring to the Parliamentary role.”  
Year 7 Parliament member.

### Homework

The school has had to take a hard line on a number of things with students, staff and parents. The online homework package introduced in 2014 allows staff, students and parents to see what is being set and when it is due. There is nowhere to hide now. Parents are sent alerts to their phones of what homework has been set and leaders are able to easily monitor the quality and regularity of work being set in their areas. Students who struggle to organise themselves make good use of the extensive homework clubs and study support sessions offered after school. A compulsory Independent Learning Club (ILC) has been introduced with the support of parents for such students. Parents have found that as their child is now completing homework in the ILC there is less conflict and stress in the home.

### » YEAR 6 / 7 TRANSITION

As a small school we pride ourselves in getting to know our students. Our links with our feeder schools are excellent and our induction programme for Year 5 and 6 students includes taster days, regular visits to lessons and joint celebrations. We believe that Year 7 is a very important stage in the education of students and success at this stage leads to a greater success in the future years. This is why we invest heavily in our transition programme and take the time to get to know our students well at a very early stage. The transition programme for the children coming to Parkside will include tuition support with the Y6 SATs, a joint Parkside Sports day with all feeder primaries, a transition week in July and regular visits to Parkside throughout Year 6. Most importantly, our students tell us that what we are doing works.

“Coming to Parkside for a week meant we could find our way round in September without getting lost.” Year 7 student.

“Coming here for a week in the summer term meant that I got to meet new friends and got to meet the teachers. Parkside is a really good school.”  
Year 7 student



# Sir Graham Balfour



A developmental curriculum helps ensure student engagement



Headteacher David Wright

Sir Graham Balfour is a true comprehensive school. We serve two of the most economically deprived wards in Stafford but also a number of more affluent rural areas. This provides an eclectic social mix and an intake which has a huge range of abilities on entry. We are regularly oversubscribed.

The range of abilities poses a particular challenge. A close, longstanding and active relationship with each of our primary partners has been key to ensuring we 'hit the ground running' with students right from the start of Year 7. We use the in-depth information gathered via our transition programme to highlight groups for targeted support. Ongoing analysis of progress data throughout KS3 ensures a focus on the needs of all students. We believe any attainment gaps are best addressed early, as, over time, if left untreated, they will inevitably widen. We provide extensive support in both Literacy and Numeracy in order to ensure all students can access the rest of the curriculum.

A continuing dialogue with primary colleagues about the development of the new National Curriculum has influenced markedly our curriculum design at KS3, especially in the core subjects. We are currently working in conjunction with several partners to develop our own method of assessment following the abolition of National Curriculum levels and to devise a joint developmental curriculum which will foster progression throughout both primary and secondary phases.

A key to our year on year advances in *achievement* has been our intense focus on all aspects of teaching and learning. Teaching staff are actively involved in continual strategic reviews of their curriculum, their delivery and their achievements which are recognised and celebrated. Strengths are systematically shared and everyone, whether a member of Leadership Group or a Newly Qualified Teacher, is welcome

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: David Wright
- » 11-18 Community Comprehensive School
- » Location: Stafford
- » 900 students including 120 in the Sixth form
- » 61 teaching and 39 non-teaching staff
- » 18% of students eligible for Pupil Premium
- » 21% of students with Special Educational Needs
- » Ofsted rating: Good with Outstanding features



A Coaching Trio

“Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Students show great enthusiasm and are often totally engrossed in the tasks that are set for them”

Sir Graham Balfour students visit Sir Graham Balfour Cambodia biennially



and even invited, to contribute to the delivery of an extensive in-house programme of Continual Professional Development. Support in the form of planning days, visits to other schools and regular observations of colleagues has resulted in a staff who willingly embrace change and who are committed to constant innovation, reflection and self-improvement. In addition, Coaching Trios, where staff are placed in a group of 3 and conduct an ongoing evaluation of each other's practice, have proved to be particularly successful in raising standards.

The contributions of our non-teaching staff have also been an integral part of our success. We have an extensive, bespoke development programme aimed at addressing individual need and on ensuring that all colleagues

recognise and appreciate the importance of their role in helping to raise student achievement.

The impact of this approach comes over strongly in the following comments from our most recent 'Investors in People' report:

- » 'I get a real sense that what I do is valued.'
- » 'Staff consistently demonstrate their commitment to the success of the school and see this as their prime responsibility whatever their role'.

We have developed a real sense of *community* in a host of ways. We were one of the first schools in the area to introduce a mixed age, vertical tutor system. When a student transfers from primary school, they are placed in a tutor group which includes students from Years 7-11. This works on so many levels. Each tutor group is a micro-community in itself and is part of a larger community within one of four Houses. An extensive programme of House activities helps instil a real sense of belonging and Inter-House competitions develop a healthy respect for competition.

Our wider community activities have an intense local focus. We support a number of charitable organisations and initiatives. We provide ongoing support to a local hospice, to local care homes, a dementia village and to the Young Carers group. The support we provide goes far beyond one-off fund-raising activities, but involves regular contact and interaction with many different groups of students.

We are also very proud of a community initiative which gives a global dimension to our activity. In 2002, when Sir Graham Balfour School was re-built under a PFI initiative, we moved into our new accommodation. Aware of how fortunate we were compared with others, we wanted to do something significant to address

disadvantage elsewhere. We focused on Cambodia where the educational infrastructure had been systematically dismantled under the Khmer Rouge. In partnership with a Japanese-American charity, we embarked on a project to build a school in Chiphat province, using funds raised from a host of school-based activities. Sir Graham Balfour Cambodia opened in 2004 and now has 400 students. Four original classrooms became six and our ongoing financial support has provided computers, solar generators, classroom resources, playground facilities and even helped fund staff salaries. On a biennial basis, several of our Sixth Form students visit the school to teach and to assess areas of future need.

We pride ourselves on the *inclusive involvement* of students at Sir Graham Balfour School. All are eligible to stand for our School Parliament which has a very active role in shaping school life. They review school aims, negotiate changes to school rules and help organise many of our enrichment activities. A recent 'Futures Day' was devoted to the theme of 'Respect'. All staff and students undertook activities devised by Parliament resulting in real pride in collaborative outcomes.

In May 2015, we held a mock general election to coincide with the actual one. Debates on key issues, structured campaigns, opinion polling and a 'Question Time' session involving the Parliamentary candidates for Stafford were significant features of the exercise which culminated in a ballot. Later in the year, all student candidates were taken to London where they met the victorious MP for Stafford who showed them round the Palace of Westminster and provided tours of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and a visit to key Government buildings.

The positivity students feel from vibrant teaching and learning, active community involvement and from



SGB students and staff with MP for Stafford Jeremy Le Froy outside Parliament

inclusive collaboration, is an important factor in creating an appropriate climate for learning. Our latest OFSTED report highlighted that: 'Behaviour in lessons is exemplary. Students show great enthusiasm and are often totally engrossed in the tasks that are set for them'.

All these activities have generated momentum from within and are sustainable in the long term. They provide an excellent platform for further progress. The next logical step has been for us to create a more formal structure for our partnerships in the form of a Multi-Academy Trust. This fits well with our motto which is: 'Learning, working and succeeding' together.



# Stratford Upon Avon School



Neil Wallace, Headteacher



An exciting range of extra-curricular opportunities

Secondary school is a formative experience for young people. Our mission is to engage, enthuse and inspire; to create an environment where young people can achieve extraordinary things. We are passionate about ensuring that our students are supported, challenged and inspired throughout their time with us.

## REPORT CARD

- » Headteacher: Neil Wallace
- » No. of students: 1400, including 240 in the Sixth Form
- » Age range: 11–18 years
- » Catchment area: students attend from approximately 35 primary schools in the Stratford upon Avon area
- » Academy since 2011, with 193 staff comprising of 81 full time equivalent (FTE) teachers and 77 FTE support staff
- » Ofsted rating: Good (2016)

All schools have a unique feel and Stratford upon Avon School is characterised by passionate, creative and innovative practice. The culture of the school is based upon positive relationships and the belief that we work better and are more productive when we feel good about ourselves and trust each other.

## Engaging Learning and Teaching

In the three years since being appointed Headteacher at Stratford upon Avon School I have had the opportunity to appoint over half of the teaching staff. Employing high quality, engaging teachers is particularly important in creating a unique atmosphere in our area where the local grammar schools are often presumed to be superior. We have also invested in ensuring that all teachers seek to refine their practice. Appointing staff whose primary task is to improve the performance of classroom teachers is often overlooked in many schools. At Stratford, we have made a financial commitment to appoint a team of Lead Practitioners who have been fundamental to enabling the culture of the school to focus on teaching that engages students. Whilst they are outstanding teachers in their own right, our Lead Practitioners have a significantly reduced teaching load enabling them to enthuse and coach staff so that colleagues are encouraged to take risks and bring a sense of fun into their pedagogy, rather than simply being told what to do. This has resulted in a commitment to developing learning and teaching which permeates the school.



This cultural change has manifested itself in many different forms, including One Minute Wonders where staff share brief practical tips and Feel Good Friday teaching challenges for the following week. A series of voluntary internal and external TeachMeets enable teachers to share best practice, practical innovations and personal insights in sharply focussed 2, 5 or 7 minute presentations. When 43 of our teachers voluntarily gave up an evening to share ideas in the last week of term at one of these TeachMeets, we knew that we had established a common purpose that was sharply focused on improving the quality of learning and teaching. Underpinning all this are rigorous and innovative assessment and data tracking systems which are enabling staff to deliver improved student progress and attainment.

### Warm relationships and opportunities that enthuse

Good learning and teaching are underpinned by a curriculum tailored to meet students' needs. Consequently, examination results, behaviour, attitudes to learning and attendance have improved. Students select their GCSE options in Year 8 and it is important that the right people study the right courses for the right reasons. Another important impact is the raised profile of the school as perceived by parents and carers and the local community.

We pride ourselves on the experiences and relationships that our youngsters benefit from.

We offer a mouth-watering range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities to enthuse our students. Traditional academic courses are supplemented by exchange programmes with France and Spain, work experience placements in Paris, visits to Ypres, Berlin and New York, alongside local events like workshops with the Royal Shakespeare Company.



Engaging Learning and Teaching

These run alongside more vocational options including an Architecture and Construction GCSE which is sponsored by a local company, whilst specialist staff are brought in to deliver Hair and Beauty courses in our bespoke, on-site studio.

Stratford benefits from the opportunities available at a large school, though we have a pastoral system to ensure that it feels like a small school. The school has a genuinely warm atmosphere and supportive relationships between students and staff. This is enhanced by vertical tutoring and our college system which provide both a family atmosphere and a competitive element within school. Every morning students meet in mixed age groups. These groups help break down barriers and enable younger students to make older friends easily, thus creating a nurturing atmosphere.

“The school’s published aim through its curriculum is to ‘engage, enthuse and inspire’ and this aim is met”

Ofsted, 2016

Encouraging students to explore their own interests allows for growth





The next steps



Inspiring the best start in life

### Inspiring the best start in life

The purpose of education is to prepare youngsters for adult life and we believe that the best place to do that is in a non-selective, co-educational environment. Students need to develop the skills to thrive alongside different people in different environments. To support youngsters moving to the next stage of their career, we are home to the Warwickshire 'Career Hub'. Working in partnership with an independent careers company, the school has effectively three full time employees dedicated to providing the best information, advice and guidance to our students. This innovative approach creates opportunities for youngsters to meet industry professionals – in lessons, through careers talks and in after-school masterclasses. These sessions broaden their understanding of the variety of modern work opportunities and the employability skills that are essential to their making the right GCSE, A level and career choices.

We offer an enviable range of opportunities including targeted events like our Careers Working with Animals Evening, Apprenticeships Evening and visits from a range of professionals linked to different subjects which are also open to youngsters from other local schools.

### The next steps

We have a relentless focus on improving the education of our young people. We are determined to continue raising aspirations and expectations so that all our students have the skills, attributes and qualifications to flourish in the future. Since being appointed in 2013, our achievements have given the wider school community a confidence that we can continue our mission to become one of the best schools in the country and drive further improvements over the coming years.

The challenge over the next few years is to continue to devolve leadership responsibilities to maximise the input of staff and students. Empowering middle leaders to lead will particularly enable the school to move forward by unleashing more creative ideas. Similarly, we need to encourage all members of staff to take responsibility for their own performance and development as we seek to embed a self-improving culture. To sustain real improvement we need to develop closer links with our partner primary schools so that we are able to provide greater continuity of experience for the young people and their families whom we serve. That is something we are now in a position to do.

“Pupils receive information, careers advice and guidance of the highest quality to help them move forward with their learning. This is a real strength of the school”  
Ofsted, 2016



# Thomas Becket Catholic School



Building a curriculum that is centred on individual learning pathways is critical for the future success of our students



The Principal has taken some tough decisions since her arrival and this is a school which continues to improve

Thomas Becket Catholic School was placed into special measures in March 2013; every category was graded as inadequate. I became the Principal in September 2013. For the first six weeks, every stone I turned revealed deep rooted issues. Systems, were either not effective or did not exist. The easiest solution would have been to paper over the cracks, but, that would not have been a sustainable realistic solution.

To change a culture and ethos of a school that had very low aspirations into one of high expectations and a belief that anyone can achieve regardless of their background or ability takes time. The hard work and effort takes patience and you're often left frustrated because you don't see the results as quickly as you want.

In the first year I established a new senior leadership team and a brand new middle leadership team. The new team set a clear vision of what sustained improvement would look like; we weren't interested in quick fix solutions. We wanted to lay foundations of what will be an outstanding school. In February 2015 our Ofsted report quoted *"The Principal has taken some tough decisions since her arrival and this is a school which continues to improve"*.

All leaders have taken part in a successful coaching and mentoring programme as we want to develop an effective distributed leadership model. Systems and processes are all in place and now it's about ensuring they are effective at all times for what we want to achieve.

Recruitment was difficult and not an easy task when you're trying to recruit to a school that is in special measures. However, we have taken a relentless approach

## ABOUT THOMAS BECKET CATHOLIC SCHOOL

- » Principal: Mrs Y Lucey
- » Location: Northampton
- » Established 1975
- » Students on Roll: 729
- » Age range: 11 to 18 Years
- » 49.1% from Ethnic Minority Groups
- » 28.1% of pupils first language not/believed not to be English





We aim to build confident young learners who strive to reach their full potential

“The outcomes achieved by Year 7 students at the end of the year are outstanding with 72% of making the equivalent of one full level of progress in English and 68% of the students in mathematics”

in recruitment securing high quality staff, and not only with experience, but with fresh thinking, and high quality academic staff in teach first recruits.

Our first step was ensuring that teaching and learning improved, as that is the core purpose of our school. Teaching and learning was poor, one of the first things I did was to introduce unannounced observations; I didn't want us to become a 'Big Brother' environment, but I needed to know exactly what quality of teaching and learning students were getting typically every day. I didn't want to observe staff pull off one good lesson during a planned observation and then deliver inadequate lessons for the rest of the day. This was met initially with some resistance, but as we have improved so have our methods of observations on teaching and learning. Where possible, observations are carried out jointly with senior and middle leaders to allow for peer professional development and sharing of good practice. We now employ three Lead Practitioners to develop teaching and learning across the school as well as having a central teaching and learning hub where staff can drop in for resources and coaching tips.

Accountability was previously non-existent and introducing systems that made everybody accountable has been a steep learning curve for staff. Performance Management is rigorous and we are aspirational in our targets. Staff understand that there is a greater emphasis placed on their own professional performance. To complement our robust performance management there is a strong personalised approach to continuing professional development. All briefings with staff have teaching and learning at the heart of discussion and this has helped to focus staff in raising expectations.

In the early days, we looked outwardly to work in partnership with two

local outstanding secondary schools, The Duston School in Northampton and Sir Christopher Hatton based in Wellingborough. We identified what we needed in good and outstanding practices and these were then shared and modelled throughout our school.

Bringing consistently good outcomes across all subjects doesn't happen overnight and our first areas to tackle were English and Maths. English historically achieved in line with national averages in most areas and significantly outperformed Maths. We employed the Head of Maths from one of our local outstanding schools as our Executive Head of Maths for the first two years. Our results dramatically improved to be in line with national averages and we now have our Director of Maths initiating the same model of good practice with other faculty leaders within our school.

Creating high expectations across the school for everyone also meant we had to teach our students to develop high expectations for themselves. We introduced the 'Non Negotiables'. This is an expectation that students arrive on time to school, fully equipped with essential items and ready to learn for the day and to take pride in the quality of their work that they produce. The vast majority of our parents have supported us in this new approach to make our students responsible for their own learning.

Our student voice has developed and increased its role across the school. Students are very much involved in reshaping, developing and improving the school.

We have a vibrant sixth form which has been judged good by Ofsted.

Our sixth form students know that they are role models for our younger students and many are student ambassadors - you will often find the sixth form students sat with our

younger students assisting them in literacy and numeracy lessons when their timetable allows.

In September 2014 we opened a football academy. This is run by Eddie McGoldrick, an ex-international footballer who has played for various premiership clubs including Arsenal and Crystal Palace. There are 38 students following a programme of excellence in football training balanced with outstanding academic qualifications. This is set to develop further as we become a satellite foundation club for premiership club Crystal Palace in 2016.

Building a curriculum that is centred on individual learning pathways is critical for the future success of our students. Individual guidance and support of our students in choosing the right learning pathway to secure successful student outcomes is now starting to come to fruition.

Our first year students, Year 7 follow a bespoke curriculum model in our Phoenix centre. According to their individual starting points, students spend a substantial proportion of their timetabled curriculum in the centre focusing largely on literacy and numeracy with specialised teaching staff. This model allows our students to feel safe and secure and has helped them in the transition from primary to secondary school, as well as quickly developing the academic learning skills needed for their GCSE studies which they will begin in Yr9.

The outcomes achieved by Year 7 students at the end of the year are outstanding with 72% of students making the equivalent of one full level of progress in English and 68% of the students in mathematics

Extra-curricular activities are an integral part of student life at Thomas Becket Catholic School; we believe that these opportunities add to our student's

personal development and character. We also run the Duke of Edinburgh award and this year a group of sixth form students are taking a three week expedition to Borneo which has been completely funded by the students own fund raising activities.

## What Next

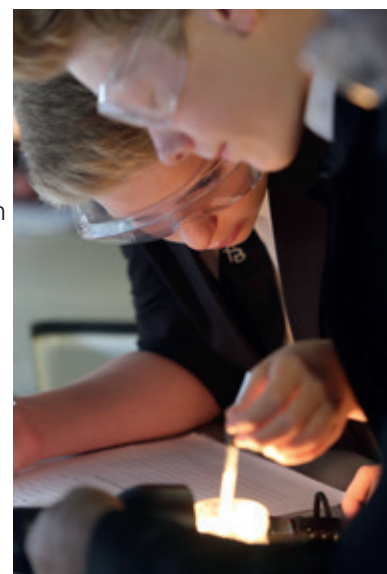
There is still a huge amount to do but we will not stop until we achieve outstanding outcomes for all of our students. We will continue to have teaching and learning at the core of everything we do and want it to be outstanding across all areas

We want to develop a house system built around our 5 core values of Faith, Justice, Compassion, Truth and Respect that will strengthen the already strong sense of family and community at the school.

We aim to build confident young learners who strive to reach their full potential by teaching them the love of learning and what it can secure for a bright future.

Along our journey we aim to build a learning community where students will have the support and opportunities to meet their full potential and one that prepares them to take their own steps towards creating an exciting, everlasting dent upon the universe.

Since becoming Principal of a school that was in special measures there have been many highs and lows in everything we do and the changes that we have made, but being part of a team that is improving a school has been extremely rewarding. Our Catholic school is built around the 5 core values of Respect, Truth, Justice, Compassion and Faith. We base everything we do on these core values and we will continue to strive to be outstanding.



Extracurricular activities are an integral part of student life at Thomas Becket Catholic School

“Our catholic school is built around the 5 core values of Respect, Truth, Justice, Compassion and Faith”

## Graceful in defeat – David Cameron responds to the verdict of the EU Referendum

Eleven months after delivering the first outright Conservative General Election victory since 1992, David Cameron came to the Commons Dispatch Box as a lame duck Prime Minister, a caretaker who would remain in office only until his successor could be named. The Referendum vote to leave the EU had ended his career with brutal finality.

He was cheered by his MPs as he arrived in a packed Commons Chamber and he seemed remarkably good humoured. Moments before he rose, the newest MP, Rosena Allin-Khan, who had been elected to replace Labour's Sadiq Khan, the new Mayor of London, had been introduced. With mass resignations from Labour's Shadow Cabinet as the leadership crisis in the Opposition unfolded, he advised her to keep her phone on because she might be promoted by the end of the day.

Then he gave his response to the Referendum decision. 'It was not the result that I wanted, or the outcome I believe is best for the country I love but there can be no doubt about the result. Of course I do not take back what is said about the risks; it is going to be difficult...' He also promised that an upsurge in hate crime against migrants would be stamped out.

One of his key announcements was that he would not trigger the formal EU exit process – Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty – and the timing of that decision and the nature of the future



David Cameron's resignation speech outside 10 Downing Street

relationship Britain would seek with the EU were matters for his successor. He said he would take that message to the emergency European Council meeting that had been convened for the next day, to respond to the Brexit vote.

'Tomorrow will also provide an opportunity to make the point that although Britain is leaving the European Union we must not turn our back on Europe or the rest of the world,' he added.

For Labour, Jeremy Corbyn – accused of fighting a lacklustre referendum campaign – said his party had put





With the upheaval caused by the UK's European referendum, many questions are still to be answered

forward a positive case for Remain and had convinced two thirds of its supporters. He said people in many communities felt disenfranchised and powerless because they had been failed, not by the EU, but by Tory governments.

He complained that the campaign had been marked by untruths and half-truths and added, in a pointed rebuke, that 'the country will thank neither the Government benches in front of me nor the Opposition benches behind for indulging in internal factional manoeuvring...' – an observation that provoked a blast of scorn from Tory and SNP MPs, and silence from the Labour benches.

With Scotland having voted to remain in the European Union, the SNP's

Westminster Leader, Angus Robertson, said the Scottish Government would seek to protect Scotland's place. 'We are a European nation and it really matters to us that we live in an outward-looking country, not a diminished little Britain.'

The Liberal Democrat Leader, Tim Farron, said he still passionately believed British interests were best served by being at the heart of Europe. A few moments later his predecessor, the former Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, said it could not be right that the Conservative Party members who would elect Mr Cameron's replacement would, in effect, choose a new Government. Surely, he said, there should now be a General Election?

A series of Conservative Leave campaigners, the veteran Sir Bill Cash, the former Cabinet Minister, Owen Paterson, and others praised the Prime Minister for holding the referendum, a line also taken by UKIP's sole MP, Douglas Carswell, who was heavily heckled as he warned that the task of implementing Brexit could not be left to 'Europhile mandarins' and called for prominent Leave campaigners to be involved – a comment which provoked a backbench shout of 'Yeah Farage.'

This was the first of what will doubtless be scores of Commons statements on the Brexit process – they will become a fixture in Parliament for years to come.

## Trident Submarine Renewal

The first Commons outing for a new Prime Minister is normally a great occasion in its own right, but Theresa May's debut, following the withdrawal of her final opponent in the Conservative leadership race the week before, was overshadowed by a spectacular outbreak of Labour infighting.

She was moving a motion to confirm plans for a multi-billion pound programme to replace the submarines which carry the UK's Trident Missile nuclear deterrent – a move which underlined her personal commitment to Trident renewal which, she said, was essential to national security.

She was challenged by the SNP's George Kerevan who asked if she, personally, would order a nuclear strike which would kill 100,000 innocent men, women and children. Her response was a blunt, unadorned 'Yes'. A nuclear deterrent was pointless if a government was not willing to use it, she added.

She had open support from Labour backbenchers including John Woodcock, MP for the submarine-building seat of Barrow and Furness... 'Whatever she is about to hear from our Front Benchers, it remains steadfastly Labour Party policy to renew the deterrent while other countries have the capacity to threaten the United Kingdom and many of my colleagues will do the right thing for the long-term security of our nation and vote to complete the programme that we ourselves started in Government.'

The Prime Minister answered with an approving quote from Labour's manifesto, which said Britain must remain 'committed to a minimum, credible, independent nuclear capability, delivered through a Continuous At-Sea Deterrent'.

The Green MP, Dr Caroline Lucas, said the UK's nuclear weapons drove nuclear proliferation. Theresa May did not accept that at all – and she took a direct swipe at Dr Lucas. 'Sadly, she and some Labour Members seem to be the first to defend the country's enemies and the last to accept these capabilities when we need them.'

The Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, questioned the 'ever-ballooning' cost of Trident renewal – but for him the central issue was this 'Do these weapons of mass destruction – for that is what they are – act as a deterrent to the threats we face and is that deterrent credible?'

Unlike the Prime Minister he was not prepared to press the nuclear button. 'I would not take a decision that killed millions of innocent people. I do not believe that the threat of mass murder is a legitimate way to go about dealing with international relations.'

Mr Corbyn faced repeated challenges from his own MPs. Angela Smith noted he was 'Fond of telling us all that the Party Conference is sovereign when it comes to Party policy. Last year the Party Conference voted overwhelmingly in favour of maintaining the nuclear deterrent, so why are we not hearing a defence of the Government's motion?' Mr Corbyn retorted that Labour's policy was under review, provoking more shouts from Labour MPs.

The bombardment continued. The former Defence Minister, Kevan Jones, compared Labour's defence review to the mythical unicorn; people believed it existed but no-one had ever seen it. Former Shadow Armed Forces Minister, Toby Perkins, said the case for not replacing Trident had fallen apart. Former Shadow Defence Secretary, Vernon Coaker, said Britain could not abandon its responsibilities as a senior member of NATO.

The SNP's Westminster Leader, Angus Robertson, said the people



The UK's Trident Missile nuclear deterrent was one of the first issues Theresa May faced as the UK's new Prime Minister



The Government voted in favour of the renewal of Trident



HMS Vanguard  
returning to Faslane,  
Scotland

of Scotland had repeatedly shown their opposition to Trident renewal – and he added ‘The Government have a democratic deficit in Scotland and, with today’s vote on Trident, it is going to get worse, not better.

It will be for the Scottish people to determine whether we are properly protected in Europe and better represented by a government that we actually elect. At this rate, that day is fast approaching.’

## The vote to bomb ISIL in Syria

The Commons surprise vote in August 2013 rejecting armed intervention in the civil war in Syria was undoubtedly David Cameron’s worst-ever parliamentary defeat. That moment reverberated when, two years later in the wake of the Paris attacks, he returned to the Commons with a motion to allow British forces to strike at ISIL, or Daesh, in Syria.

He warned MPs that ISIL was plotting Paris-style attacks against Britain and had already targeted this county. ‘We face a fundamental threat to our security. ISIL has brutally murdered British hostages. They have inspired the worst terrorist attack against British

people since 7/7 on the beaches of Tunisia and they have plotted atrocities on the streets here at home. Since November last year our security services have foiled no fewer than seven different plots against our people, so this threat is very real. The question is this: do we work with our allies to degrade and destroy this threat and do we go after these terrorists in their heartlands from where they are plotting to kill British people, or do we sit back and wait for them to attack us?’

He was attempting to rally all-party support for the use of British forces in Syria – they were already launching



airstrikes against ISIL in neighbouring Iraq – but many Labour MPs were fuming about remarks he had made the previous evening to a meeting of Conservative MPs, when he suggested people who voted against airstrikes were ‘terrorist sympathisers’. He faced repeated challenges to withdraw and apologise – but stuck to a formula that unity was needed and that it was time to move on.

One focus for questions was the Prime Minister’s claim that there are 70,000 moderate Syrian opposition fighters who could act as a ground force against ISIL while the UK gave air support. Under questioning from the SNP’s Westminster Leader, Angus Robertson, he said he was not arguing that all of those 70,000 were ideal partners but if action was not taken now, those forces would soon be reduced.

Another issue was the position of Labour MPs. In 2013, the Opposition Leader at the time, Ed Miliband, had not been prepared to back the Government. By 2015, a combination of horror at the brutality of ISIL and at the Paris attacks meant there were many who supported the use of armed force and would defy any attempt to make them vote against it. Crucially, their number included the Shadow Foreign Secretary, Hilary Benn.

Jeremy Corbyn was opposed to extending the bombing but, under huge pressure, had allowed his MPs a free vote. ‘It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Prime Minister understands that public opinion is moving increasingly against what I believe to be an ill thought out rush to war. He wants to hold this vote before opinion against it grows even further.’

Another key force in the debate was the Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee which had earlier published a report raising a series of questions



Hilary Benn took the opposite view to Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn over intervention in Syria

about any intervention which the Prime Minister was careful to answer in detail. Its Chair, the Conservative Crispin Blunt MP, said Britain’s military effort in Iraq had helped stabilise the country in the face of a rapidly advancing threat from ISIL and he now supported extending that effort to across the border into Syria.

The ensuing debate produced a series of passionate speeches – the Liberal Democrat Leader, Tim Farron, gave an emotional description of his experiences visiting refugees who had made the risky journey to Greece. ‘A seven-year-old lad was lifted from a dinghy on the beach at Lesbos. My Arabic interpreter said to me, ‘That lad has just said to his Dad, “Daddy are ISIL here? Daddy are ISIL here?”’



Tim Farron, Liberal Democrat Leader

Winding up the debate for Labour was Hilary Benn who took the opposite view to Jeremy Corbyn. 'The carnage in Paris brought home to us the clear and present danger that we face from Daesh. It could just as easily have been London, Glasgow, Leeds or Birmingham and it could still be.' He said the UK could not leave its defence to others and asked what message inaction would send to Britain's allies – France, in particular.

He listed some of their atrocities: the gay men thrown off the fifth storey of a building in Syria, the mass graves in Sinjar said to contain the bodies of older Yazidi women murdered by Daesh because they were judged too old to be sold for sex, the killing of 30 British tourists in Tunisia, 224 Russian holidaymakers on a plane, 178 people in suicide bombings in Beirut, Ankara and Suruç and of 130 people in Paris 'including those young people in the Bataclan, whom Daesh, in trying to justify its bloody slaughter, called apostates engaged

in prostitution and vice. If it had happened here they could have been our children.

'We are faced by fascists – not just their calculated brutality but their belief that they are superior to every single one of us in this Chamber tonight and all the people we represent. They hold us in contempt. They hold our values in contempt. They hold our belief in tolerance and decency in contempt. They hold our democracy – the means by which we will make our decision tonight – in contempt... My view is that we must now confront this evil. It is now time for us to do our bit in Syria. That is why I ask my colleagues to vote for the motion tonight.'

While Jeremy Corbyn folded his arms and looked away, Mr Benn sat down to rapturous cheers and even applause from both sides of the House. A few minutes later the Government motion was carried with 66 supporters from the Labour benches outweighing the seven Conservative opponents.

## MPs pay tribute to their murdered colleague, Jo Cox

Tributes to Jo Cox MP



On Thursday 20 June, a week before the EU Referendum, campaigning was in full swing – the usual cycle of attack, rebuttal and counter attack was being played out. Suddenly the political world shuddered to a halt as news emerged of the brutal murder of the Labour MP, Jo Cox, outside a constituency surgery in her Yorkshire seat.

The House of Commons had been in recess for the Referendum, and was recalled to pay tribute the following Monday. The chamber was packed but the seat normally occupied by Jo Cox was left empty, except for two roses – Labour's red rose and the white rose

of Yorkshire. In the gallery, Mrs Cox's husband Brendan sat with their two young children and members of their family.

MPs wore white roses and several women Labour members were dressed in the suffragette colours of purple and green. Some MPs wept quietly as the Speaker, John Bercow, opened proceedings 'We meet today in heart-breaking sadness but also in heartfelt solidarity... all of us who came to know Jo during her all too short service in this House [she had been elected in 2015] became swiftly aware of her outstanding qualities, she was caring, eloquent, principled and wise.

'Jo was murdered in the course of her duties, serving constituents in need... An attack such as this strikes not only at an individual but at our freedom.'

The Labour leader, Jeremy Corbyn, agreed the murder was an attack on democracy and he quoted from Jo Cox's maiden speech when she told the Commons 'We are far more united and have far more in common with each other than things that divide us'.

David Cameron said the House could best honour her memory 'by proving that the democracy and freedoms that Jo stood for are indeed unbreakable, by continuing to stand up for our constituents and by uniting against the hatred that killed her, today and forever more'.

Tributes were paid from all sides, in a short sitting, which was followed by a memorial service at St Margaret's, the parish church of Parliament. The Labour MP, Rachel Reeves urged colleagues 'to carry on Jo's work and guard against hatred, intolerance and injustice and to serve others with dignity and love.... Batley and Spen will go on to elect a new MP, but no-one can replace a mother'.



Jo Cox's maiden speech to Parliament: 'We are far more united than the things that divide us'

Jo Cox had been a leading figure in several all-party groups – the Conservative former International Development Secretary, Andrew Mitchell, served with her, as co-chair of the Friends of Syria, making common cause, as he put it, 'with a crusty old Tory'.

The Labour MP, Stephen Kinnock, had shared an office with Jo Cox. He spoke first of the unspeakable personal suffering her murder had brought on her family. He said Jo Cox would have been outraged by a poster unveiled on the morning of her death by the UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, showing a queue of migrants 'A poster on the streets of Britain that demonised hundreds of desperate refugees... She would have responded with outrage and with a robust rejection of the calculated narrative of cynicism, division and despair – because Jo understood that rhetoric has its consequences. When insecurity, fear and anger are used to light a fuse, an explosion is inevitable'.



## The Lords reject the Government's Tax Credit changes

The Government lost more than 50 votes in the House of Lords in the first year of the 2015 Parliament – but by far the most significant, both in terms of the money involved and of the constitutional aftershocks, was the Peers' rejection of controversial plans to cut tax credits – the benefits used to top-up the incomes of low-paid workers.

Peers are not supposed to meddle in financial matters but this measure was not part of a finance bill. Instead it was put forward in an order, or statutory instrument, issued under existing legislation, which meant it was both un-amendable and subject to a one-off vote.

Faced with claims that the order would cost the poorest families thousands

of pounds a year, the Lords passed a Labour motion calling on ministers to postpone the cuts and provide extra support for those affected, for a three-year transitional period. The result was to throw the Chancellor's financial strategy into chaos, because it removed £4.4bn of savings.

George Osborne immediately warned that the vote raised constitutional issues and shortly afterwards the Government commissioned Lord Strathclyde, a former Leader of the House of Lords, to review the powers of the Upper House.

The debate began with the Leader of the House, Lady Stowell, defending the plans. She said spending on tax credits had risen from £4bn to £30bn and the bill was no longer sustainable,

The interior of the House of Lords



warning that interference in a key budget measure would overstep the conventions which prevent the Lords from overriding the tax and spending decisions of the elected Commons.

'In our manifesto, my Party made it clear that reducing the deficit would involve difficult decisions, including finding savings of £12bn from the welfare budget. The regulations that we debate today deliver no less than £4.4bn of those savings next year alone,' she explained.

That argument was challenged by Lord Campbell-Savours, a Labour peer and former MP. 'When the Prime Minister said at the last general election that an incoming Conservative government would not cut tax credits – child tax credits – was he telling the truth or was he deliberately misleading the British people?' Lady Stowell retorted that the Conservatives had been very clear in their manifesto that they would aim to make welfare savings of £12bn and that working-age benefits would be targeted.

There were four amendments in front of Peers: the Liberal Democrat Lady Manzoor had put down a 'fatal motion' which would stop the changes; the second and third introduced delays. The fourth – from the Bishop of Portsmouth – simply expressed regret at the policy. All but the last, Lady Stowell warned, would challenge the primacy of the Commons on financial matters.

Lady Manzoor said 4.9 million children would be affected by the cuts to tax credits. 'We have a duty in this House to consider our constitutional role but we also have a duty to consider those affected by the decisions we make and the votes we cast.'

She went on to say that it was wrong to enact such a major change via 'a statutory instrument, a tool designed



Baroness Stowell argued that tax credits 'will remain an important part of the welfare system'

for minor changes to processes and administration, being used to implement a substantial change in policy that will affect millions of people's livelihoods. That is not my decision but I hope that we will do everything we can to stop it'.

The second amendment was from the crossbencher, Lady Meacher, who wanted to delay the changes. 'The lowest income families, stand to lose more than £20 a week. For one of us this can mean a meal in a restaurant. For a poor working family it can mean a pair of shoes for a child who comes home from school crying because their toes are hurting in shoes that are too small, or money to feed the meter to keep the family warm.'

The Labour former Work and Pensions Minister, Lady Hollis, proposed the third amendment which would postpone the cuts for three years while transitional protection was brought in. She dismissed talk of constitutional crisis. 'We can be supportive of the Government and give them what they did not ask for – financial privilege – or we can be supportive instead of those three million families facing letters at Christmas telling them that on average they will lose up to around £1,300 a year.'

The Conservative former Chancellor, Lord Lawson, supported the changes



Lord Lawson, former Chancellor of the Exchequer



and insisted peers had no right to reject them but he wanted reform of the whole tax credits system because too much money went to well-off families.

‘It is perfectly possible to tweak it to take more from the upper end of the tax credit scale and less from the lower end,’ he said.

## The Hillsborough inquest verdict

When an inquest jury ruled that the 96 Liverpool football fans who died at Hillsborough on April 15th 1989 had been unlawfully killed and that mistakes by the police and ambulance services had caused or contributed to their deaths, the Home Secretary, Theresa May, came to the Commons to announce the Government’s response in an emotionally-charged statement to the House.

The new inquest had been ordered following the devastating findings of the Hillsborough Independent Panel, chaired by Bishop James Jones, which had re-examined the evidence.

Its revelations that witness statements by police officers had been altered were so significant that it led to the new inquest and to two major criminal investigations. With 296 days of hearings it had been the longest inquest in British legal history.

Theresa May said that the findings ‘Overturns in the starkest way possible the verdict of accidental death returned at the original inquests. However, the jury’s findings do not, of course, amount to a finding of criminal liability and no one should impute criminal liability to anyone while the ongoing investigations are still pending’.

The 96 remembered at Hillsborough





She praised the families and survivors, who had never accepted official accounts which laid the blame on Liverpool fans. 'They have faced hostility, opposition and obfuscation and the authorities, which should have been trusted, have laid blame and tried to protect themselves instead of acting in the public interest.' As some MPs wiped away tears, she added 'No-one should have to suffer the loss of their loved ones through such appalling circumstances and no-one should have to fight year after year, decade after decade, in search of the truth'.

Labour's Shadow Home Secretary, Andy Burnham, said the inquest jury had delivered a 'simple, clear, powerful and emphatic' verdict. 'But it begged the question: how could something so obvious have taken so long? There are three reasons: first, a police force that has consistently put protecting itself over and above protecting people harmed by Hillsborough; secondly, collusion between that force and a complicit print media; and thirdly, a flawed judicial system that gives the upper hand to those in authority, over and above ordinary people.'

He said a similar inquiry was now needed to clear up what had happened at Orgreave during the 1980s Miners' Strike and his final words, about the families of the 96, produced applause from MPs. 'They have kept their dignity in the face of terrible adversity. They could not have shown a more profound love for those they lost on that day. They truly represent the best of what our country is all about. Now it must reflect on how it came to let them down for so long.'

The Conservative, Bob Neill, who chaired the Commons Justice Select Committee asked the Home Secretary to look at creating a mechanism to ensure 'proper equality of arms,' between the families of disaster victims



Theresa May, speaking  
as Home Secretary

and the authorities in dealing with inquests and legal proceedings.

The former Lord Mayor of Liverpool, Steve Rotherham, – one of several MPs at Hillsborough that day – said the Liverpool fans had always known they were not to blame. 'It took political intervention to force the judicial process of this country to take 27 years to recognise what we knew from day one – that Hillsborough was not an accident... that drunken and ticketless fans did not turn up late, hell-bent on getting in and that it was not caused by a drunken "tanked-up mob".'

The Liberal Democrat, Greg Mulholland, said the families of victims had been treated appallingly in the aftermath of the disaster. 'We saw police officers sitting eating chicken and chips in the gymnasium as the bodies were lying there, while families were told that they could not hug their loved ones in body

bags because they were the property of the coroner. Worst of all, the initial coroner forced alcohol testing on all these victims – including children such as

10-year-old Jon-Paul Gilhooley – of this unlawful disaster. That was a disgrace, and we want to know that it will never happen to a single victim again.'

## An unexpected Leader of the Opposition



Jeremy Corbyn took a different approach at his first PMQs, tackling former PM David Cameron with crowdsourced questions

When the Speaker called on Jeremy Corbyn, as Leader of the Opposition, at Prime Minister's Question Time (PMQ), it was the first time in 30 years in the Commons that the veteran left-winger had spoken at the Dispatch Box. Unlike the three rival candidates he had defeated so conclusively in Labour's leadership election, he had never been a minister or shadow minister still less sat in Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet.

He was facing a Conservative Leader who had been one of the main players in PMQs for a decade and who had coached previous Tory Leaders on how to handle it for years before that. Things were about to change, Labour's new leader wanted a different kind of PMQs, led by the concerns of the public – and he received 40,000 replies when he asked people to email him with their questions for David Cameron.

'I have taken part in many events around the country and had conversations with many people about what they thought of this place, our Parliament, our democracy and our conduct within this place,' he explained. 'Many told me that they thought Prime Minister's QuestionTime was too theatrical... and that they wanted things done differently but above all they wanted their voice to be heard in Parliament.'

The result was something quite different, dominated by bread-and-butter issues but with little of the familiar professional political fencing – at least at first. The opening question was from a woman called Marie who wanted to know what the Government intend to do about the 'chronic lack of affordable housing and the extortionate rents charged by some private sector landlords'.

David Cameron observed parliamentary protocol and congratulated Mr Corbyn on his resounding leadership election victory and he welcomed the idea of a new style at PMQs. He agreed more affordable housing was needed but added that the record of the Governments he had led was better than that of the previous Labour Government.

Mr Corbyn followed up with questions from Steven, on social rents and from Paul and Claire, on cuts to tax credits – a subject raised in a thousand of his emails – that he warned would cost families up to £1,300 per year and was 'absolutely shameful,' he said. The strategy was to continue; by his hundredth question, in March 2016, he had asked about health issues in

25 of them, welfare in 24, housing in 16 and education in five; it was a far less Westminster-centric approach.

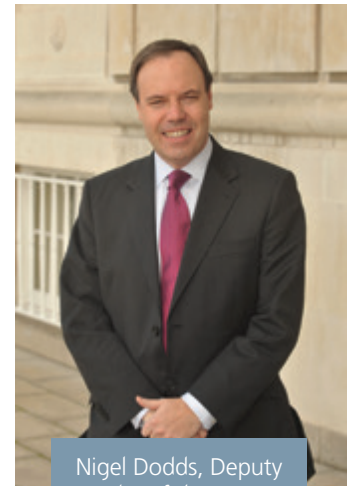
Those first exchanges were courteous and careful as the two circled one another. It was left to the leaders of two of the smaller parties in the Commons to insert a couple of barbs. The first came from the SNP's Westminster Leader, Angus Robertson, who said he was looking forward to working with the new Labour Leader to oppose Tory austerity and fight against renewal of the Trident nuclear missile submarines – a highly divisive issue among Labour MPs, most of whom do not share their leader's unilateralist views.

Then, the Leader of the DUP at Westminster, Nigel Dodds, raised Mr Corbyn's key appointment to Labour's front bench team, his veteran left-wing ally, John McDonnell, as Shadow Chancellor. Mr Dodds pointed to the plaques by the entrance to the Chamber in memory of Airey Neave, Robert Bradford, Ian

Gow and Sir Anthony Berry – MPs murdered by terrorists. He added 'The Opposition Leader has appointed a Shadow Chancellor who believes that terrorists should be honoured for their bravery. Will the Prime Minister join all of us, from all parts of this House, in denouncing that sentiment and standing with us on behalf of the innocent victims and for the bravery of our armed forces who stood against the terrorists?'

That produced loud "Hear, hears" and the Prime Minister replied that Mr Dodds had spoken for the vast majority of people in Britain. 'My view is simple, the terrorism we faced was wrong... The death and the killing was wrong. It was never justified and people who seek to justify it should be ashamed of themselves.'

That flash of steel was a harbinger of the Prime Minister's increasingly dismissive treatment of the Labour Leader in later PMQs – culminating in his advice to Mr Corbyn to 'put on a decent suit'.



Nigel Dodds, Deputy Leader of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)

## Responding to the Chilcot Report on the Iraq War

It had been a long time coming, and the Parliamentarians in both Lords and Commons had complained about the time taken by Sir John Chilcot to produce his report on the decision to go to war in Iraq. When it did arrive, seven years after he started work, his two million word verdict provoked cross-party soul-searching and recrimination.

Sir John concluded that the UK went to war before the peace process was exhausted, that the intelligence on which the decision was based was flawed and that the planning for the aftermath was inadequate. The Prime Minister, David Cameron,

responded with a Commons statement – he began by addressing the families of the 179 British servicemen and women and 23 British civilians who died in the conflict. 'In their grief and anger, I hope they can draw at least some solace from the depth and rigour of this report and, above all, some comfort from knowing that we will never forget the incredible service and sacrifice of their sons, daughters, husbands and wives.'

He turned to the keystone of the argument for war in 2003. 'Central to the Government's case was the issue of weapons of mass destruction. Sir John finds that there was an



Tony Blair, Prime Minister during the invasion of Iraq





UK troops in action in Iraq

“ingrained belief” genuinely held in both the UK and US Governments that Saddam Hussein possessed chemical and biological capabilities.’ The evidence for that belief, he found, was not properly examined.

Mr Cameron voted for military action as a Conservative backbencher, in 2003. He said lessons needed to be learned – and the first was that ‘taking the country to war should always be a last resort and should only be done if all credible alternatives have been exhausted’. He then added that the British people should not, in future, recoil from any military intervention. ‘There are unquestionably times when it is right to intervene, as this country did successfully in Sierra Leone and Kosovo... there have been times in the recent past when we should have intervened but did not, such as in failing to prevent the genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica.’

The Labour Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, who voted against military action in 2003, was heckled by some of his MPs when he condemned the invasion. ‘Frankly, it was an act of military aggression launched on a false pretext, as the inquiry accepts, and has long been regarded as illegal by the overwhelming weight of international legal opinion. It led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the displacement of millions of refugees... By any measure, the invasion and occupation of Iraq have been, for many, a catastrophe.’

In what many took to be a veiled reference to Tony Blair he added. ‘We now know that the House was misled in the run-up to the war and the House must now decide how to deal with it 13 years later.’

The Chilcot inquiry published more than 200 memos from Tony Blair to

President George Bush. The Leader of the SNP at Westminster, Angus Robertson, pointed to one which he thought was particularly telling. 'On 28 July 2002, Tony Blair wrote to President Bush saying I will be with you, whatever.'

His point about the real reason for the invasion was picked up by the senior Conservative, David Davis. 'The aim was regime change, not WMDs.

That fact, and the fact that, as Sir John Chilcot says, Blair's commitment made it very difficult for the UK to withdraw support for military action, amount to a deception and a misleading of this House of Commons. It is not the only one. Sir John has been very careful about avoiding accusing the former Prime Minister of lying to the House but a lot of the evidence suggests that he did. What action can this House take to deal with that?'

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## David Cameron and the Panama Papers

The publication of the Panama Papers, a massive cache of documents detailing the tax-avoidance activities of thousands of people across the world, became a personal crisis for the Prime Minister, David Cameron, when his late father's name cropped up.

The leak was from the world's fourth biggest offshore law firm, Mossack Fonseca, and documented the activities of more than 200,000 companies holding property and bank accounts in offshore tax havens like the British Virgin Islands. No-one suggested that the Prime Minister's father had done anything illegal; Ian Cameron had run an offshore fund through Mossack Fonseca that avoided British taxes for thirty years.

Faced with rising anger about the extent to which rich people could avoid taxes, David Cameron released a summary of his tax returns for the previous six years, plus details about money inherited and given to him by his family, his salary, the support received as Leader of the Conservative Party, the income from the renting out of his home and the interest on his savings. The Chancellor, George Osborne, followed suit and the Labour

Leader, Jeremy Corbyn, published his tax return. The Prime Minister made a statement to the Commons, as soon as the House returned from its Easter break.

He was not suggesting all MPs would have to publish the same information, arguing that since the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and their Labour opposite numbers were, or wanted to be, responsible for the nation's finances, they were a special case.

He accepted criticism of the way he'd handled questions about his finances but told MPs he'd been angry about the way his father's memory was being traduced 'I want to put the record straight. This investment fund was set up overseas in the first place because it was going to be trading predominantly in dollar securities so, like very many other commercial investment funds, it made sense to be set up inside one of the main centres of dollar trading.'

He added that pension funds, along with other institutions, invested in offshore funds and that, from now on, most British overseas territories which are tax havens will share information with the UK authorities.



Labour MP Dennis Skinner was thrown out of Parliament for labelling the Prime Minister over his personal finances.

Jeremy Corbyn said the Panama Papers had 'driven home what many people have increasingly felt: that there is now one rule for the super-rich and another for the rest. I am honestly not sure that the Prime Minister fully appreciates the anger that is out there over this injustice... with families lining up at food banks to feed their children, disabled people losing their benefits, elderly care cut and slashed and living standards going down. Much of that could have been avoided if our country had not been ripped off by the super-rich refusing to pay their taxes'.

The leader of the SNP at Westminster, Angus Robertson, also complained that the rules for normal taxpayers were different from those 'for a small ultra-rich elite' but he focused on the UK's 'particular responsibility' for dealing with tax avoidance in its overseas territories and dependencies.

Andrew Tyrie, the influential Conservative Chair of the Treasury Select Committee said there was 'no point in moralising' about legal tax avoidance – what was needed was

action to close loopholes in the law and tax simplification to ensure there were fewer of them.

Meg Hillier, the Labour ex-minister who chairs the powerful Public Accounts Committee (PAC), said the publication of the Panama Papers 'shone sunlight on areas where some people did not want it to go and she called for more corporate tax transparency. That theme was picked up by her predecessor at the PAC, Margaret Hodge, who had led a high profile inquiry into tax avoidance by multi-nationals. She wanted assurance that HMRC would have access to the register of companies operating in British Crown dependencies.

A Conservative former minister, Sir Alan Duncan, accused the Prime Minister's critics of hating 'anyone who has even a hint of wealth in their life... we risk seeing a House of Commons that is stuffed full of low achievers who hate enterprise and hate people who look after their own family and who know absolutely nothing about the outside world'. The Prime Minister may not have found that entirely helpful, saying 'I do not want us to discourage people who have had a successful career in business or anything else from coming into this House and making a contribution'.

Labour veteran, Dennis Skinner, said the Prime Minister had failed to answer questions about a taxpayer-subsidised mortgage and to Conservative fury he added 'Maybe Dodgy Dave will answer it now'. The Speaker immediately stepped in to ask him to withdraw the word 'Dodgy' but Mr Skinner was unrepentant 'This man has done more to divide this nation than anybody else and he has looked after his own pocket. I still refer to him as Dodgy Dave'. Moments later he was ordered from the Chamber.



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