



The meaning of the term curriculum has been discussed by many experts for many decades and the development of a strong curriculum offer is never finished.

It is important for us all to understand and share with stakeholders that the curriculum is not just the taught subject content delivered within each academy, but something that also includes a full range of knowledge, skills, and experience that we aim to impart to our students.

Achieving strong academic outcomes is of course important as this opens opportunities in life, but I'm also particularly pleased to read about the wider range of experiences and skills that have been delivered to our students over the last few weeks.

Everyone who works within our MAT deserves, and is entitled to, professional development and throughout this edition there are many examples of sharing strong practice, for example - SDG's, TNG's, engagement with external partners, MAT specialist training etc. If there are any areas of future professional learning you wish to be included in, please let your line manager know.

As a final thought...communication between all stakeholders is a complex task and it can always be improved. Please remember to share your thoughts and stories so that we can all feel up to date and "connected".

**MR SIMON JONES | CEO**

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# CONNECTING WITH BOURNVILLE

## RAISING STANDARDS

It has been a busy term as we continue to raise standards at Bournville. Our most recent Ofsted visit has given us some really clear feedback on how to move forward as a school. One of the things we have been working on at the moment is our literacy strategy. Staff have received training from Debbie Tremble this term, which has been enacted by our staff in their teaching practice. The part of the strategy which we are currently exploring is the use of Frayer models in lessons, where students use a graphic organiser to build their vocabulary knowledge. This is a researched informed strategy based on evidence from the 'Improving Literacy in Secondary Schools' guide, written by Alex Quigley and Robbie Colman on behalf of the EEF. The second recommendation of this guide is to provide targeted vocabulary instruction in every subject. It has been a real pleasure to see all of our subject areas using Frayer models to teach vocabulary. A particular highlight was a Year 7 Art lesson, where students were learning about 'expression' and then using this art movement to deliberately practice their water colour techniques.

As a school we are continuing to improve our personal development offer to students. This area of the school was graded 'good' by Ofsted in our inspection last

November. We have strengthened ties with the University of Birmingham to secure student mentors who will work with our Year 10 students each week. The academic mentors form part of the Aimhigher and Forward Thinking Birmingham programmes. Our thirty Year 10 students currently receiving this support are unanimous in praise for the mentoring they are receiving. In addition to mentoring, we have also had multiple visits from a range of different providers this term. Last week we welcomed LoudMouth theatre company into school to deliver a production linked to the SRE curriculum. Fix Up! have also been in school to deliver the first session of their 'man up' programme to twenty male students. This was the first of eight sessions which cover a range of topics in order to prepare young male students with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in life. Some of our female students have benefited from sessions with Anawims, who have led sessions on healthy relationships and body positivity. Student outcomes are important for improving life changes, but we also put our students' personal development and welfare at the heart of everything we do.

**MR DAN THOMAS | DEPUTY HEAD OF ACADEMY**



# CONNECTING WITH ERDINGTON

## STEP TOGETHER PROJECT

Since the return of students in September we have tried our best to ensure we re-establish a normal educational culture against the backdrop of the previous two years. In doing this we have had to be conscious of the context of our local community and the heightened anxieties of some young people. One of the areas of concern, prior to March 2019, students consistently identified in our regular safeguarding surveys was safety before and after school in the local area.

Through our work with the police and crime commissioner, we knew when a new national scheme was being piloted in Birmingham to help keep children and young people safe before and after school, that we had to be involved.

The "Step Together" project has initially partnered with Erdington Academy in Birmingham and sees youth workers based along routes to school, acting as trusted adults and a point of contact before and after school in the local community.

Their job is to de-escalate potential violence and to build positive relationships. Schools, young people and community members have helped to identify where along the route the youth workers would make the most difference.

Whilst the scheme was launched in Erdington, seventeen other routes nationally will also open in the near future and will operate until the end of the school year.

The Home Office and the Youth Endowment Fund are investing £1.2 million in the national project to test if this approach increases safety, as well as improving attendance at school. If successful, other schools around the country may also adopt the scheme.

The West Midlands Violence Reduction Unit (VRU) is a multi-agency unit that includes local authorities, education, health, youth, faith and community groups as well as the police. All of these partners have been involved in bringing Step Together to the West Midlands.

The West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner Simon Foster, said: "Preventing violence and keeping young people safe is exactly what the Violence Reduction Unit is all about. "Every pupil has a right to walk safely to and from school and I hope this initiative will help them do just that. "I'm delighted to jointly launch this project and help get more youth workers back on the streets to support our young people.

We know violence and intimidating behaviour can, occur on any walk to and from school, so to actively take steps to prevent that from happening in Erdington is a really positive step. Part of any school's role is to ensure that they enhance the communities that we serve.

**MR SIMON MALLET**  
**HEAD OF ERDINGTON ACADEMY**



# CONNECTING WITH ERDINGTON

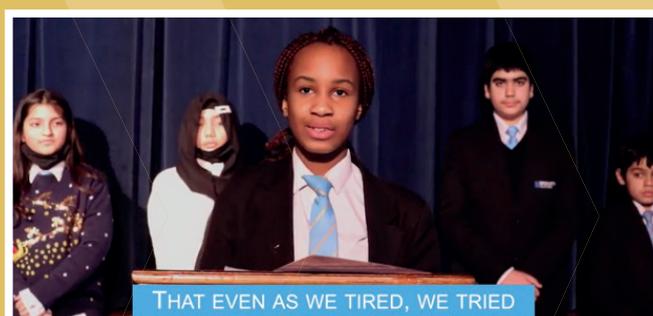
## CULTUREFEST

This year has been, like the last few, unprecedented (to again use a word which has soared in frequency in recent times). Our staff and students, like those in schools across the world, have had to demonstrate incredible amounts of resilience, adaptability and perseverance during 2021, and the month of December was no different.

With cases of Covid-19 soaring in Birmingham, it became increasingly apparent that to hold the Culture Fest 2021 event in-person at the academy, weeks before the end of term when families were hoping to reunite, would be both precarious and unlikely. Acknowledging the hard work that students had already put in, and the importance of performance and celebration of extra-curricular talent, staff (and their partners!) worked to create the first ever virtual celebration event the school had seen. On a Friday in December, students and staff united with the help of a marketing administrator to film the incredible breadth of talent Erdington Academy had to offer. On that day, supported by Mr Wheatley, Mr Haughton, Mr Pank and Miss Johnson, students read poetry in native languages, recited spoken word, danced, played beautiful music on the piano, African drums and ukuleles and sang. The determination and confidence of our students absolutely shone, as they coped with not only performing but excelled at being filmed.

We were then able to stream a professionally edited Culture Fest video with the rest of Erdington Academy on the last day of term, after the awarding of Amazon gift vouchers. The buzz students got from seeing their peers 'on stage' once more was truly rewarding to see, and students at the school are now excited to see the return of more performance-based events in 2022. The full event can still be found on the school blog, under Culture Fest 2021.

**MISS JOHNSON**  
**SUBJECT LEADER ENGLISH KS4**



# CONNECTING WITH ERDINGTON

## CLUB LINKS

The pandemic has undoubtedly limited the opportunities for young people to participate in sport and join local clubs. To address this issue the PE department at Erdington Academy have worked hard to develop club links and bring in top quality coaches.

We have continued to work with the Dallaglio Trust and Erdington RUFC allowing our students to access coaching from ex-Tongan national rugby captain Aleki Lutui. As well as rugby specific skills, the coaches from the Dallaglio Trust have taught the students the haka and are delivering an accredited leadership qualification to year 11 students.

Aston Villa provide extra-curricular football clubs to year 8 and 11. The focus of these clubs is to use football as a vehicle to mentor students on anti-social behaviour, gangs and knife crime. We are looking forward to expanding this provision in 2022 so that all year groups can access.

Cricket is a sport that a large proportion of our students are passionate about. However, many of them do not access cricket coaching and clubs outside of school. We have now set up the "Wicketz" project that provides top level coaching from Warwickshire Cricket club to all year groups. The aim is for the coaches from Warwickshire get the students to a skill level in which they are confident to join a club and direct them to an appropriate local club, this initiative has allowed many of our students to join local cricket clubs.

We have also launched new club links with City of Birmingham Basketball and have access to equipment coaching and free tickets to watch games for students in all year groups. The club also recognises talented basketball players and directs them to City of Birmingham Basketball club, one of the best teams in the country.

The number of girls participating in netball has risen dramatically with over 40 students participating consistently each week. We have developed great links for netball with excellent taster sessions run by Hayley from Sutton Town Netball Club during extra-curricular club, to develop sustainable exit links with our students to play the sport out of school.

**MR MATTHEW BROTHERTON | SUBJECT LEADER BOY'S PE**



# CONNECTING WITH FAIRFAX

## EISTEDDFOD

Whilst Omicron tried to thwart our efforts at reinstating Eisteddfod, we were delighted to run our Performing Arts Festival without an audience in the week before Christmas. Participation forms a massive part of our excellent personal development offer at Fairfax and it is an aspect that Covid has impacted on severely.

We were really excited to begin our 'Eisteddfod Zone' in October, launching the 80s theme that was postponed in December 2020.

This year students got to bake 1980s party food, photograph 80s photo booth images, design pop art pictures and write 1980s diaries of significant 1980s events as their entries.

On performance nights, leg warmers, shoulder pads and pop music were prominent features as students competed in vocal, choir, instrumental, dance spoken work and drama. The highlight of both evenings for me was my all-time favourite song A-ha's 'Take On Me' being sung by so many Fairfax students – a memory I will treasure!

Each of the 4 Houses have taken home the Eisteddfod Cup in the last 4 years and there was a real sense of anticipation when the winners were announced on Friday, 17 December 2021. A tie between Coventry and Kenilworth saw an unusual outcome and a fantastic move back to performing Eisteddfod on stage at Fairfax.

A massive well done to students, Heads of House, Assistant Heads of House, House Captains and all staff that supported the event. We are Fairfax!

**MRS DEBORAH BUNN | HEAD OF ACADEMY**



# CONNECTING WITH FAIRFAX

## SAFEGUARDING AT FAIRFAX

After 4 years away from Fairfax Academy I am pleased to be returning to commence my role in the Senior Leadership Team as Safeguarding Lead and DSL. I consider myself very fortunate to have remained working within the Trust at Smith's Wood Academy where I gained invaluable experience and thoroughly enjoyed my time working with a great Safeguarding and Pastoral Team. The opportunity to be back at Fairfax Academy is one I relish, particularly being able to follow in the footsteps of Sue Mulhern who has been a true inspiration over many years.

I first knew Sue Mulhern as a teacher when I was a student and the respect I have for her has continued to grow as I have progressed through my career. I am sure I speak for the whole team when I say we wish her a very happy and well-deserved retirement after 26 years of loyal service to Fairfax Academy.

The challenge now is for me to continue her good work as we move forward and to continue to develop our practices in the post-pandemic environment. The Safeguarding Team is growing; we have two new Deputy DSLs joining the current team to meet the needs of our 1600 students to ensure they are safe, educated, supported and best placed to thrive throughout their formative years with us.

I very much look forward to working with our Trust Safeguarding Lead, Karen Cornell, and Academy DSLs to continue to develop our practice in order to ensure excellence in our safeguarding for all our Trust students.

**MRS JACKIE MACE | AHT – SAFEGUARDING LEAD AND DSL**



# CONNECTING WITH SMITH'S WOOD

## IMPROVING SOFT SKILLS

At Smith's Wood Academy we recognise the importance of soft skills and values (also known as common skills or core skills and are skills which are desirable in all professions). At Smith's Wood Academy we have identified resilience, communication and organisation as the skills that we want to develop within our students. To ensure our students understand why these skills are important and how they will benefit them in the future, we have created the Smith's Wood 'Why?' values and they now flow through our curriculum and enrichment plans. We want our students not to be afraid of failure (resilience), we want our students to be confident presenters and have excellent oracy skills (communication) and we want our students to manage their lives to maximise their academic progress but also prioritise their well-being (organisation).

We have also invested significant resources into using the expertise of professional and specialist organisations to help us on our journey and, now that we can have visitors in the Academy, this work is well under way.

Talk The Talk are a charity providing staff and students with a range of practical oracy workshops – all delivered by professional experts and qualified teachers, especially trained in the use of oracy as an educational tool.

**Talk The Talk**  
CONFIDENT COMMUNICATION FOR LIFE

Talk The Talk are working with all of our students in year 7, 8 and 9 for a whole day in February 2022 to provide students with the skills needed for group talk and practical opportunities to explore and develop these skills.

### During the workshop students will:

- Identify, discuss and demonstrate the skills required for effective group discussion and listening.
- Negotiate individual preferences for future employment within a group situation.
- Discuss and practice the language of discussion and roles within group presentation.
- Engage in a whole class 'balloon' debate within small groups
- Plan, deliver and compete with other groups in delivering a structured presentation regarding an end of year event.

At the end of the workshop Talk The Talk's support doesn't end. Classroom resources are provided to build on what has been started. This allows us to continue to boost communication opportunities and ensure that strong oracy skills are embedded within the mindsets of our students.



## PAT BENSON BOXING ACADEMY COLLEGE



Resilience, well-being and organisation are very closely linked and the PE faculty at Smith's Wood Academy have secured the support and services of the Pat Benson Boxing Academy to support student through curriculum activities and also targeted extra-curricular activities.

**The Pat Benson Boxing Academy** is a Community Sports Foundation and is aimed at increasing social and community inclusion. The projects are designed to enable people to achieve in life through the power of sport, by improving their physical and mental wellbeing.

At Pat Benson Boxing Academy our students will go through a transformative process, pushed to their limits both physically and mentally. Staff encourage and support students to perform to the best of their abilities on a daily basis. The specialist coaches endeavour to offer subject content in an engaging way, encouraging pupils to become independent, self-reliant learners. Such qualities are mirrored throughout the boxing training delivered to pupils on a daily basis in an attempt to further strengthen character and resolve.

Our students leave Pat Benson Boxing Academy having matured into resilient, confident young adults with an appreciation and respect for the diverse cultures and communities found within our city. They will also have gained qualifications to bolster their credentials and give them real opportunities to be successful in their own chosen paths. Students will be able to look back with pride with what they have achieved both academically

and physically, through their own hard work and dedication.

The aims of the programme are completely aligned with the values of the Academy and the Trust:

- To provide a safe, welcoming learning environment.
- To work alongside schools and parents in an attempt to reintegrate disengaged students back into an education that pupils care about and invest in.
- To improve punctuality and attendance.
- To meet the varying needs of each pupil, providing individual learning plans for each student, allowing pupils to know what exactly is expected of themselves and staff.
- To provide a diverse curriculum that will offer a solid foundation for learners to progress successfully into post 16 education, apprenticeships and working life.
- To provide a unique educational facility, where physical activity is embedded into the timetable on a daily basis, benefiting the pupils' physical and mental wellbeing.
- To increase awareness of the diverse cultures and communities found within Birmingham.
- To improve behaviour through effective implementation of behaviour strategies.
- To improve academic achievement.

**MR RICHARD CORNELL | HEAD OF ACADEMY**

# CONNECTING WITH SMITH'S WOOD

## LOUDMOUTH WORKSHOPS

At Smith's Wood Academy we recognise that there are many ways of getting key messages to our students and we are fortunate to have secured a series of workshops from Loudmouth, Loudmouth Education and Training is a highly respected and innovative theatre in education company. The company has been delivering Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) since 1994 and has reached over 600,000 children, young people, professionals and parents. Loudmouth provides a range of programmes and formats that can support safeguarding and relationship education. Loudmouth's work aims to ensure a future where all children and young people are healthy, happy, safe and resilient.

We have spoken to our students about their needs are we have secured a bespoke package from Loudmouth:

### MY MATE FANCIES YOU (YEAR 7)

This programme teaches about the range of physical and emotional changes that take place in the adolescent body during puberty. The programme uses a fun and informative drama plus discussion workshop to help children and young people to understand transitions and puberty (including the menstrual cycle), reassure them that it is normal/not something to worry about and advise them where to go for support.

### BULLY4U (YEAR 7 AND 8)

This programme teaches about the many forms of bullying including cyber, sexist/sexual, homophobic

bullying and bullying linked to sexting. Includes work on respect in relationships and male victims of teenage relationship abuse. Evaluation has shown that this programme increases young people's empathy for victims of bullying, increases young people's knowledge of different types of bullying and where to go for help and support.

### CALLING IT OUT (YEAR 9)

This programme reinforces to students the vital message of non-tolerance of harmful sexual behaviour. The performance and discussion-based workshop explore where these behaviours are coming from and alternative positive behaviours. The programme raises the groups' awareness of the huge impacts these everyday incidences of sexual harassment and assault can have on girls and young women and how we all have a role in safely challenging and reporting these behaviours.

The programme aims to raise the students' awareness of what is harmful sexual behaviour and its many forms, where these behaviours are rooted and the impacts they have on those experiencing them. The programme is designed to challenge these negative attitudes and behaviours and promote equality and respect towards girls and women. We hope that the students will leave the session having learnt basic strategies to support them to safely call out and report incidences of sexual harassment and assault.

**MR RICHARD CORNELL | HEAD OF ACADEMY**



# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

**MARTYN JOBLING | DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

This half term has seen some excellent developments across the MAT, with each academy making progress in supporting the children both pastorally and educationally. From this edition of FMATConnect onwards you will be able to read regular updates from the School Improvement Team regarding the work they are doing. Contributions will also come from the Chairs of the Strategic Development Groups (SDG's) as the work these vital groups are completing start to have a positive impact on us all.

I have been focussed on ensuring the right support is in place for leaders across the four academies to enable them to best prepare year 11 and 13 for their forthcoming examinations. It does look like this year we will have exams for the first time in two years and the support that the children will need is more significant than previously. We must remember that year 11 students haven't had an uninterrupted school year since they were in year 8!

When I visit each academy, it is great to see all the support in place for the students and the work that has been completed at departmental level to build upon the strengths and areas for development that have come out of the results of the mock exams. As a MAT we continue to invest in the professional learning of all employees, and I am delighted to announce that Debbie Bunn will be increasing from one day per week to full time in her role as Trust Professional Learning and Wellbeing Lead from September 2022. Debbie will be working with the rest of the School Improvement Team to ensure that all colleagues receive the highest quality professional learning and

support opportunities to help them carry out their duties impactfully and effectively regardless of your current role and career stage. The work she will be focussing on will benefit all colleagues across all academies and the central team.

As a Trust we understand the importance of strong leadership and I believe firmly that strong, effective leadership is key to continued and sustainable school improvement. Part of my job is to ensure that leadership capacity in all academies continues to be developed by working with Heads of Academy to reduce unnecessary workload and also to ensure the best quality leaders are recruited into posts where we have a vacancy. In all academies we are moving to a two Deputy Head of Academy model by September 2022 and this week we were thrilled to appoint Jay Holtom to the post of pastoral Deputy Head of Academy. Jay is an experienced Assistant Head Teacher with a proven and strong track record of school improvement in schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged students and I am sure his addition to the team at Smith's Wood will support the academy in its journey to good. I would also like to congratulate Dan Thomas from Bournville on his recent promotion from Assistant to Deputy Head of Academy; Dan's hard work and impactful approach to improving behaviour across the academy has been a key factor in ensuring Bournville has continued to improve since the successful Ofsted visit in November.

**MR MARTYN JOBLING | DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION**

# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

## ATTENDANCE | TRUST PASTORAL LEAD

It was announced last month that 'The DfE is consulting on more prescriptive absence rules, ordering schools to be 'proactive' and councils to use their 'full range of legal powers''. Education secretary, Nadhim Zahawi, said the proposals will "end the postcode lottery of how attendance is managed in different schools and parts of the country, and make sure every child and family gets the best possible support to attend school as regularly as possible". What is heartening for us, as a Trust, is that this has been at the forefront of our thinking since children returned to our academies post- lockdown, and we have a range of strategies and systems in place to support our families already, with more to come.

Our attendance teams have been working tirelessly to ensure that they address the individual needs of each child and family to support them in engaging with school. Having taken time to identify the main barriers to children attending school, including mental health needs and pastoral concerns, attendance teams are now deploying a range of strategies to resolve these issues. Included in these strategies are a comprehensive team of adults with specialist training to help to remove any barriers to learning and the launch (or continuation in some academies) of breakfast clubs to encourage children in and ensure they have a good start to the day.

This month also saw press releases about 100,000 children, nationally, being declared as "ghost children" when they didn't return to school after the first summer lockdown. Thankfully, our attendance, pastoral and safeguarding teams have been working together to ensure this is not the case for any of the children within FMAT. We know that regular attendance to school opens up a world of resources to children and is directly linked to academic achievement, so to ensure that no child within our Trust loses engagement with school our attendance, pastoral and safeguarding teams have been carrying out daily home visits to students who are not in school to support them in coming back. By encouraging these children to attend school we are then able to offer a wide range of pastoral, mental health and wellbeing services to them. In doing this we are able to safeguard children in our setting and ensure that we are also protecting their futures.



Youngsters with additional needs, behavioural problems or in alternative education were found to be the most likely to fail to attend school during this post-Covid period. This is what has led to us adopting an internal 'team around the child' approach to supporting children in our Academies. Regular meetings and clear communication between the SEND, safeguarding and pastoral teams will ensure that all vulnerable children receive bespoke intervention from the right team of people to support them in attending regularly.

As you can see our teams within FMAT are already working proactively at this difficult time, to ensure that every child and family gets the best possible support to attend school as regularly as possible. We will ensure that this not only continues but we will also work together to develop further high impact strategies to engage our children and families. In doing so we hope to remove the barriers that prevent them from attending school so that they too can be successful in the future.

**MRS KAREN CORNELL**  
**TRUST PASTORAL LEAD**

# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

## TRUST NETWORK GROUPS

The curriculum is our road map which ensures students have the knowledge, understanding and skill to be able to reach or exceed their potential. A carefully sequenced curriculum that reflects the age, stage and ability is the essential foundation for High Quality Education in all FMAT schools.

More widely our curriculum must provide the opportunity for our students to think hard, problem solve, be creative, be effective team players and be effective leaders. Ensuring our curriculum connects knowledge across subjects will help students make links, understanding pattern and meaning.

The retrieval of knowledge and application of skill requires practice. Our curriculum must facilitate the understanding of how to practice and provide the opportunity for students to practice with meaningful, timely, honest and specific feedback to correct misconceptions and extend more able students.

Trust Network Groups exist to share good practice within curriculum areas improving the curriculum and the extended curriculum. These groups also provide the opportunity for teams of experts to grapple with the thorny issues facing curriculum areas, to look beyond the MAT for innovative solutions and to engage in research and

development that supports the development of leaders and teams and enriches the curriculum. Common themes of assessment at key stage three have been identified as areas for further discussion and development.

For mathematics, revisiting the sequencing of the curriculum at KS3 is vital in light of the change in curriculum share and a key for them to explore moving forward will involve the development of maths through science and other numeracy rich subjects so that the change of curriculum share at KS3 does not result in a reduction in mathematical fluency.

Addressing the COVID vocabulary gap particularly for our disadvantaged students is a key issue for us all no matter the subject. Lack of wider experience and access to tier 2 and 3 vocabulary coupled with the narrowing of exposure to a rich range of language is one of the taxing areas for us to address.

As we move forwards together, the collective brain power of the Trust Networks makes us stronger and more thoughtful, hence greater than the sum of our parts.

**MRS MOIRA GREEN**

**HEAD OF BOURNVILLE SCHOOL**



# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

A SPOTLIGHT ON THE WORK OF TEACHING ASSISTANTS | TRUST SEN LEAD

Teaching Assistants play an essential role in delivering high quality education and many students in FMAT schools could not succeed without them. In more normal times their work is certainly varied but in responding to the difficulties caused by the pandemic they have proved themselves to be more adaptable, resilient, and compassionate than ever. They are quite simply absolute gold.

For students with special educational needs, and others, a teaching assistant acts as a key worker. They really connect and are able to unlock young people's potential through building trusting relationships. These are developed through daily one to one conversations, regular calls and meetings with families, and TAs being a consistent presence day to day, term to term and indeed year to year. This means that every young person in FMAT schools has a member of staff who is an expert in their strengths and needs. Teaching Assistants in our organisations are specialists in many fields, but most importantly they are expert specialists for every child they lead.

Every term Teaching Assistants review the progress made by those students for whom they act as keyworkers. This demands detailed knowledge of the student based on time spent with them and discussion with family. It also requires co-ordinating feedback from teachers and collating information from assessments to review the progress made and what the next steps should be. This is essential work that binds the triad of school, home and child. It also directly influences the level of support arranged by the SENDCo and the approaches taken by teachers.

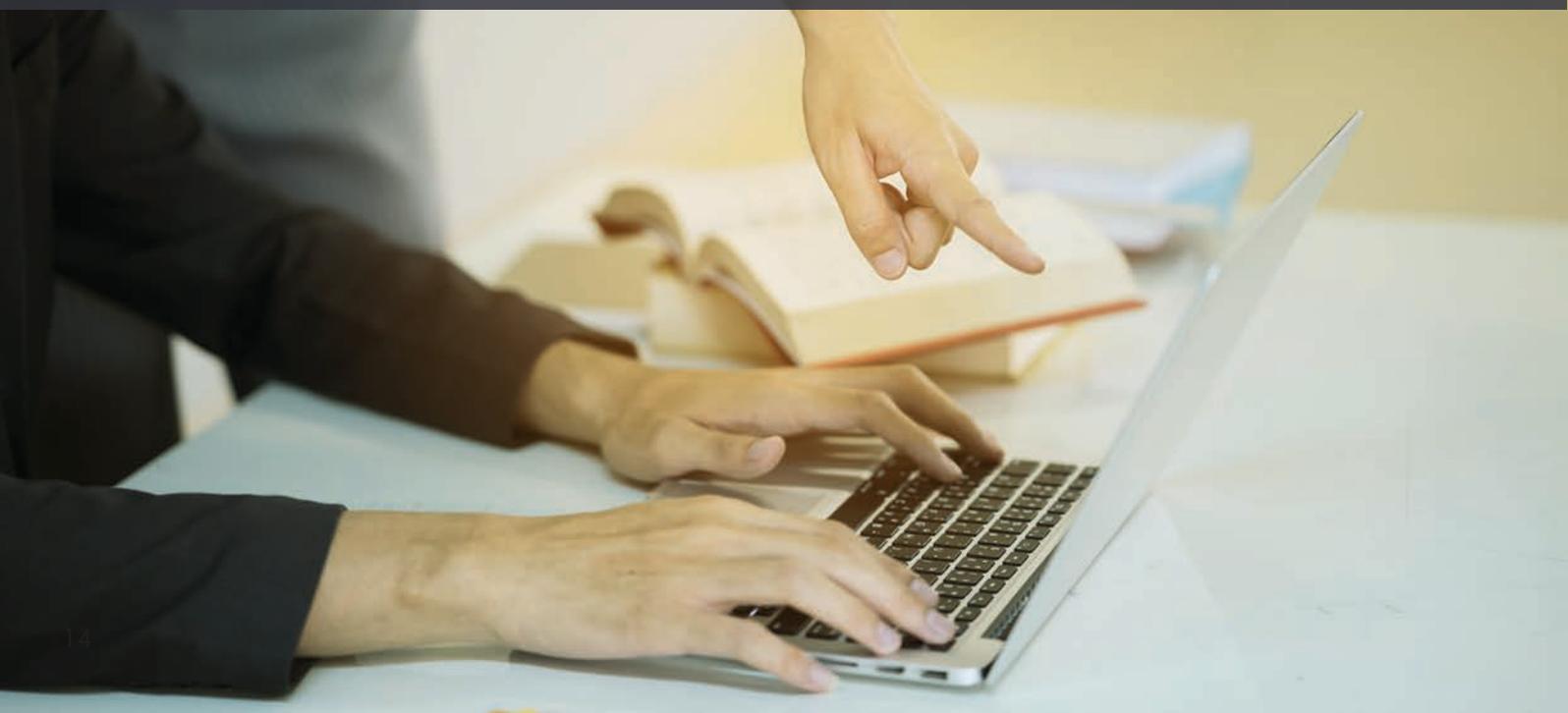
In classrooms Teaching Assistants play an active role in making sure students can access learning.

This takes many forms and includes activities such as reading text aloud, breaking down information into manageable chunks, or providing models and scaffolds that over time increase students' independence. It is always the aim of teaching assistants to start with the least amount of help that is possible. Research confirms this is the most effective approach to securing rapid progress, increasing confidence, and developing students' autonomy. SENDCOs will be working closely with TAs and teachers in the coming weeks to embed strong communication; across our Trust teachers who liaise closely with TAs about the needs of students and how these can be met in the classroom see the greatest success.

This short article can only begin to explain the diversity of tasks TAs undertake. Whether checking for and removing nits, managing those in fight / flight mode, or giving up lunch time to speak with a psychologist or offer advice to a colleague, Teaching Assistants always keep the children's interests at the heart of what they do.

The expectations across FMAT are high and remain so for all students. Our standards and aspirations will not lower. As an inclusive organisation we are committed to adapting and increasing the level of support students require to meet these standards and Teaching Assistants are an essential part of this inclusive practice. Without them some of our most vulnerable students would be further disadvantaged but the care, professionalism, and humility that TAs display mean they are an asset to our organisation.

**SIMON LYNCH | TRUST SEN LEAD**



# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

DEVELOPING WORD CONSCIOUSNESS | ENGLISH AND LITERACY LEAD

The Covid 19 pandemic has affected education in so many and far reaching ways; we are yet to fully appreciate the true impact it has had on our learners as they continue through their schooling. One such impact is the widening of, the already present, word gap. This are widely researched, with the work of Hart and Risling at the forefront. Their report, *The Early Catastrophe in the 1990s*, evaluated that by the age of three, there is a three-million-word gap between those children from advantaged and disadvantaged backgrounds. The gap only widens as children move through their schooling (known as the Matthew Effect) and contributes to a 1.8 month gap in progress by the time they take their GCSEs. At Bournville Academy, they are working towards closing this word gap with the launch of their vocabulary development strategy: developing word consciousness.

How does a school tackle the word gap, and help students develop the word hoard of 50,000 needed for the suite of GCSEs taken in Year 11? The first step is research. Evidence based research allows educators to explore the 'best bets', those initiatives that are going to make the difference. The work of Alex Quigley has been instrumental here. Quigley, an English teacher for 16 years, content manager at the Education Endowment Foundation and author, states: "The issue of children having a limited vocabulary is quite challenging in scale and subtly different from child to child." In response to this, his book *Closing the Vocabulary Gap* explores the issues surrounding why this gap exists, its impact and most importantly the strategies

schools can apply to tackle it. He recommends building students' knowledge of words: where they come from (etymology – the study of the history of a word) and the different forms a word (morphology – the study of form of things). Why? Because "The roots and parts of words unveil meaningful knowledge about their origins. If you are teaching mathematics or science, you are drawing upon language with the same Latin and Greek roots. This offers lots of useful mental hooks to understand not just the origins of words, but to deepen your understanding of their meaning." For example, take the word pedagogy – a word familiar to most of us. Pedagogy now means 'the science of teaching', and has been widely used from the 1580s onward, deriving from French *pédagogie* (16c.). But if you go even further back, it becomes even more interesting as it originated from Greek *paidagōgia* meaning 'education, attendance on boys' which derives from Greek *paidagōgos*: 'slave who escorts boys to school and generally supervises them' later 'a teacher or trainer of boys.' You can see here how the word has undergone a process of amelioration, and in knowing this, a narrative is created. Daniel Willingham wrote in his book *How Children Succeed* that in order to know more, remember more and do more we learn best through concepts and narratives. These narratives help create 'mental hooks' or schema which are essential in developing word knowledge, but also offers a method of working out what unfamiliar words might mean. Just as important, is getting children excited and curious about words, rather than overwhelmed and put off. We are creating word detectives!



# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

## DEVELOPING WORD CONSCIOUSNESS CONTINUED

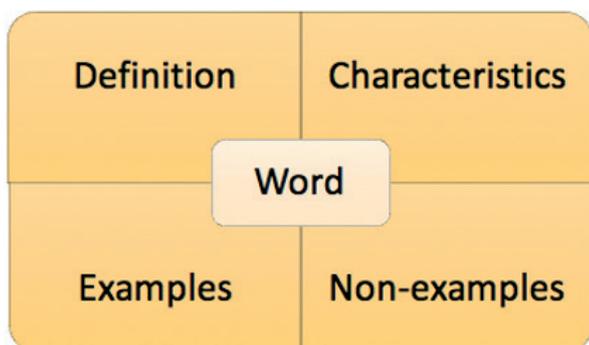
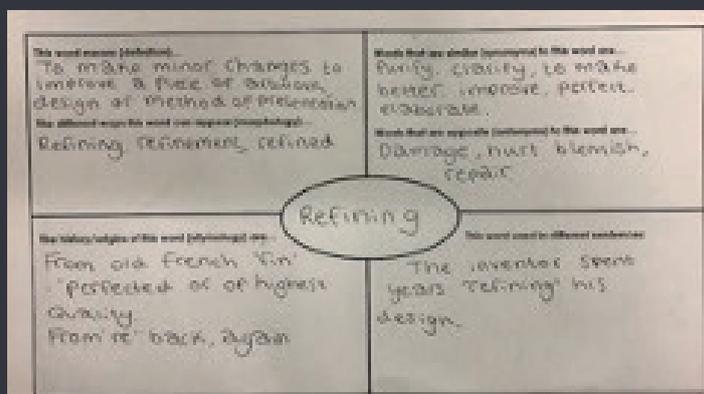
Bournville Academy then needed to choose and select which words to investigate with their students; after all, if a 50,000-word hoard is needed, then where to start? The academy had already worked on identifying key vocabulary which helps to 'unlock the curriculum' and spent some time together on the January training day, in faculties, to consolidate this. The words that 'unlock the curriculum' may be tier 2 (academic language, largely found in texts rather than used in spoken language) or tier 3 (words that are specific to a subject and technical). The words chosen are, on the whole, tier 3 in order to assist students to 'talk like a scientist' or 'write like a historian' but they also include Tier 2 words which paying attention to 'the sophisticated language of school'. These chosen words compliment the sequencing of the curriculum and are rich enough to warrant a word investigation. Once the words were identified, the next step was planning together to agree on student friendly definitions (as dictionaries often cause more confusion than clarity) and detailed exploration of that word that would help create the Frayer models to be shared with students.

The 'Frayer Model' is a long-standing graphic organiser that has been deployed in classrooms with success for decades (it was first conceived Dorothy Frayer and her colleagues at the University of Wisconsin). It is a simple but effective model to help students to organise their understanding of a new academic term or complex vocabulary choice (see opposite). However, for the benefit of the students at Bournville it was re-modelled slightly to make the terms morphology, etymology, synonyms (similar words) and antonyms (opposite words) more explicit. The Frayer model is a method for explicit teaching of vocabulary, and is given in a familiar format across the curriculum so that students recognise it in each of their subjects (thus reducing cognitive load). On the January training day, all Bournville staff received training on how to complete the model. It has now been successfully implemented across all subjects and students there are well on their way to developing their vocabularies.



The next steps for the teachers and students of Bournville is to use formative assessment to check students have consolidated their understanding of these new and unfamiliar words; checking that they are using them in their speech, in their writing and without prompting. Alex Quigley summed it up perfectly when he said explicit vocabulary instruction "should be woven into our explanations, our teacher and student talk, in the act of reading and more. Ensuring our pupils access, and confidently use, the academic language of school is essential and needs time in the school week."

**MRS DEBORAH TREMBLE**  
**TRUST ENGLISH AND LITACY LEAD**



# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

## UPDATE FROM THE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

The Assessment Strategic Development Group is one of a number of groups set up this year aimed at increasing cross-Trust discussion and collaboration. Assessment is a huge topic and this year, we have three key aims:

- 1** | to review the use of national testing at KS3 and make recommendations for next year.
- 2** | to review KS3 Assessment across the Trust.
- 3** | To increase the amount of standardisation, moderation and sharing best assessment practice that takes place between departments across the Trust.

At present we use a number of external, nationally standardised tests such as CATs and Literacy tests. The SDG will be considering the value of each of these tests and ensuring that, if we are using them, they have an impact on helping students make progress across our four academies.

The last two years of CAGs and TAGs have been very challenging, however, a real positive that came out of the process of producing them was the amount of cross-Trust moderation and standardisation taking place prior to, and after, each set of key internal assessments. We will be working closely with the Leads of the Trust Network Groups and the English and Maths Trust Leads to build on this collaboration. We all want our Year 11 mock data to be as accurate and consistent as possible as cross-Trust moderation and standardisation can play a big part in achieving that aim. We are also planning on setting up a directory of exam markers across the Trust so that we know who our assessment 'experts' are in each subject. There has been some excellent 'ad hoc' cross-Trust training that has taken place where an exam marker in a subject has delivered training for all the subject teachers across the Trust to share their knowledge of assessment. We would like to increase the amount of this type of training that takes place so that all of our schools benefit from the assessment knowledge that our exam markers have.

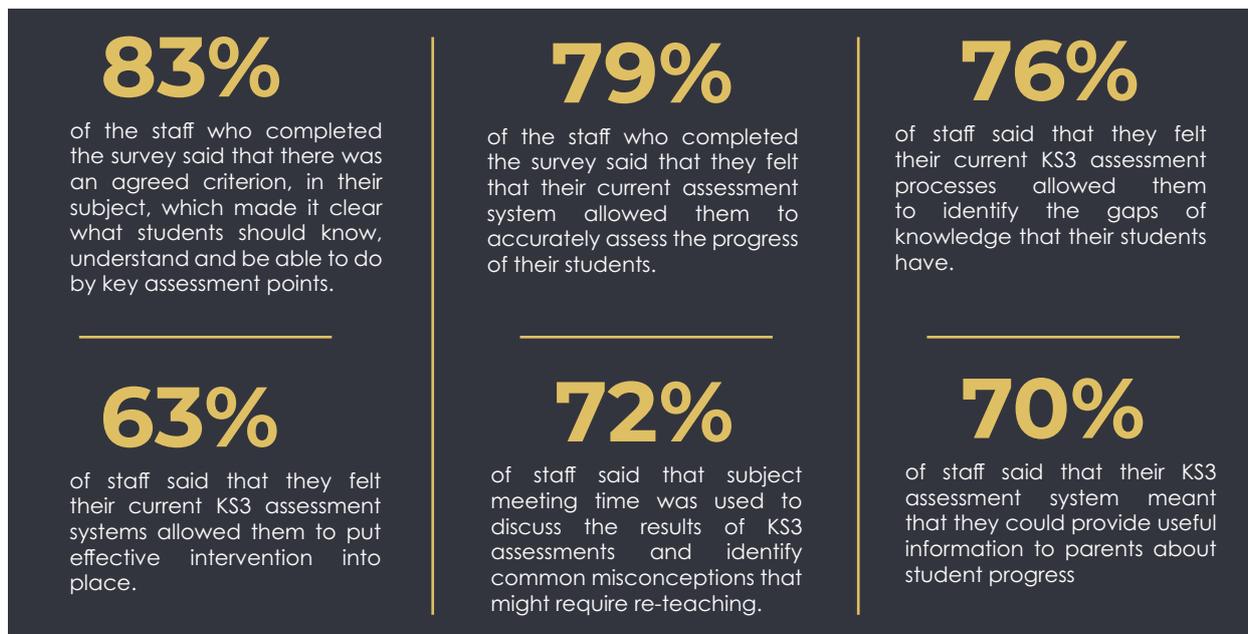
If you are an exam marker then please make your academy representative on this group aware.



# CONNECTING WITH SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

## UPDATE FROM THE ASSESSMENT STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT GROUP

Our biggest job is reviewing assessment at KS3. Since the removal of National Curriculum Levels at KS3, schools across the country have developed a range of different models for assessing student progress. In each of our academies we have tried slightly different approaches and it is now a good time to try and evaluate our differing approaches to KS3 assessment, identify areas of good practice and align our systems. The first part of this process was the KS3 Assessment Survey that was sent to all staff in the Autumn term. Thank you to everyone who completed the survey.



What was clear from the survey is that there is a lot of excellent practice going on in each of our academies but, we would want the results to be 100% for each of the statements above so there is clearly still work to be done and this is why it is important we highlight the best practice and share it across the Trust.

I know that people will have their own view on how assessment can be improved across all Key Stages, not just in formal and informal assessments, but also in our day-to-day teaching. It is important that your views are heard. The SDGs have been set up to represent your views, so if there is something that you feel we should be working on please feel free to speak to your academy's representative on the SDG, as they will share your views with the group and ensure that your voice and opinions are heard. The members of the Assessment SDG are Matthew Else and Stuart Brown from Bournville, Paul Fowler from Erdington, Kaye Downing from Smiths Wood and myself from Fairfax.

**MR TIM JOHNSON | DEPUTY HEAD OF FAIRFAX ACADEMY**

# CONNECTING WITH BUSINESS SUPPORT

## FINANCE

### EXTERNAL AUDIT

It is a statutory requirement to ensure that The Board have properly discharged their legal responsibilities to prepare their annual reports and financial statements in accordance with the applicable legislation and financial reporting requirements.

Our annual accounts as at 31st August 2021 were audited by Crowe UK to ensure that the financial statements of The Trust give a true and fair view of the financial performance of the Trust, are free from material misstatements and are in compliance with the requirements of relevant legislation and applicable Financial Reporting Standards.

We are happy to share with you that the FMAT Audit went really well with only 1 low finding and with prior year findings all implemented.

### INTERNAL AUDIT

Beever and Struthers were appointed as FMAT internal Auditors last academic year. The purpose of the internal audit is to provide the Board with independent assurance that:

- the financial responsibilities of the Board are being properly discharged;
- resources are being managed in an efficient, economical and effective manner;
- sound systems of internal financial control are being maintained and financial considerations are fully considered when reaching decisions; and
- risks are identified and appropriate actions put in place

Week commencing the 24th January 2022 Beever and Struthers undertook an internal audit on the Strategic Financial Control and Reporting. The internal audit review was to assess the content of Financial Reporting and controls in place to ensure the accuracy of data reported.

Again, we are happy to share with you that the audit went really well with no findings or areas to improve.

**SAFINA MAHMOOD | ACCOUNTANT**

## ESTATES

have worked for Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust since 2014, where I started as a Premises Assistant at Fairfax Academy, developing into a Site Lead, and I am now pleased to be starting a new role as the Trust Estates Lead.

Firstly, I would like to wish Andy Green a happy retirement and thank him for all his work towards the Estates Team over his many years!

Work will continue to ensure delivery of the Core Offer, Asset Management Plan, and improvement of each Academy site to give our students the best possible learning environment.

I am very much looking forward to working with all the dedicated Site Teams, Heads of Academy and maintaining the high standard across all sites for students, staff, and visitors.

**MR OLIVER MARSH | TRUST ESTATES LEAD**



# CONNECTING WITH BUSINESS SUPPORT

## GRAPHIC DESIGN

As part of the on-going photography initiative, I have been enjoying my weekly visits to our academies, meeting and photographing students from varying year groups.

Thank you to the teachers and support staff who help to organise these visits, ensuring I am equipped with permission sheets to comply with safeguarding and photo consent.

Whilst some students are self-conscious about being photographed, we have a lot of students who love being in front of the camera which makes my job a lot easier.

Building our image library enables us to have access to fresh up to date photos for our marketing materials as well as for publications such as FMAT Connect. Recent examples are shown on this page and the following page.

**KEELEY CLARKE | GRAPHIC DESIGNER**





# CONNECTING WITH BUSINESS SUPPORT

## SPORTS

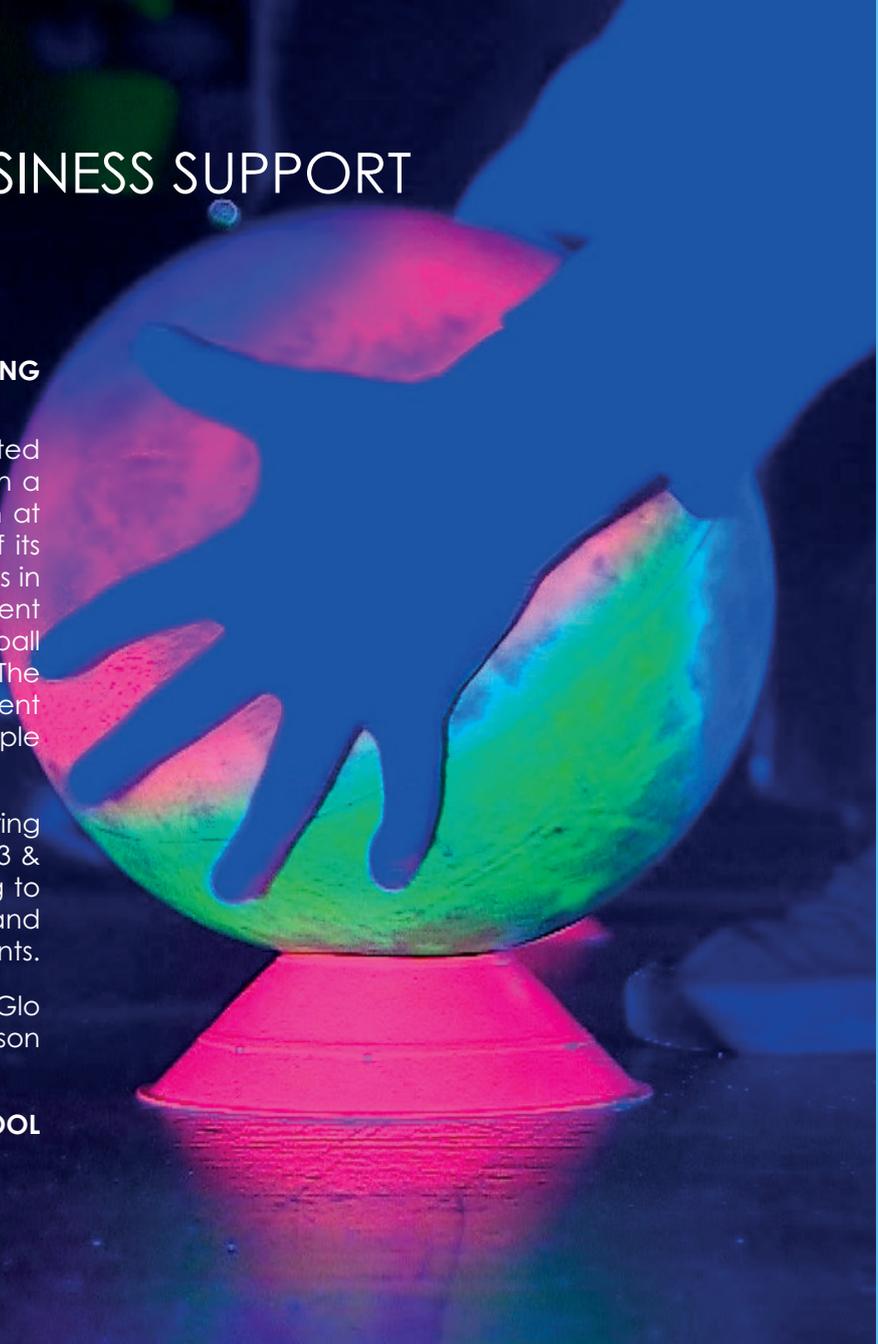
### ERDINGTON SPORTS LEADERS ARE A GLOWING SUCCESS

Erdington Academy Sports leaders supported the School Games Organiser (Ms Crump) to run a Girls Glo Sports Event for local primary children at Erdington Academy. This was the first event of its kind and it had been developed to engage girls in physical activity who lack confidence. The student leaders taught the children how to play dodgeball and volleyball - and all of it was in the dark!! The feedback from students attending was excellent with one girl stating, "I didn't care what people thought of me, I just played".

The Sports leaders have also shone whilst delivering a variety of "Multi-Skill" competitions to year 2, 3 & 4 students. The sports leaders are really starting to develop their confidence working with others and we can't wait to see them supporting more events.

If any MAT schools are interested in accessing Glo Sports for their students, please contact Alison Mapp at [ceo@ksspcic.co.uk](mailto:ceo@ksspcic.co.uk)

**MS CRUMP | ERDINGTON ACADEMY SCHOOL GAMES ORGANISER**



## SOCIAL MEDIA

In order to improve our communication links and promote our Academies and the Trust as a whole, we would like to encourage all of our employees, Directors, Associates and parents to follow our social media sites. Links to social media can be found on our websites.



[www.fmat.co.uk/](http://www.fmat.co.uk/)

[www.fairfax.bham.sch.uk](http://www.fairfax.bham.sch.uk)

[www.bournvilleschool.org/](http://www.bournvilleschool.org/)

[www.bournvilleprimaryprovision.org/](http://www.bournvilleprimaryprovision.org/)

[www.erdingtonacademy.bham.sch.uk](http://www.erdingtonacademy.bham.sch.uk)

[www.smithswood.co.uk](http://www.smithswood.co.uk)

# CONNECTING WITH STAFF REWARDS

## PERKBOX - THE STAFF REWARDS PROGRAMME

As an employee of Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust, we offer you a staff rewards system called Perkbox.

Perkbox features discounts on goods and services, monthly free prize draws, wellbeing services, and either a free cup of coffee from Cafe Nero, or a free sausage roll from Greggs each month!

Perkbox is an on line platform, accessible [here](#), but you can download the app if you have a smart phone. If you do not have an account yet, just click the below.

Perkbox offers instant savings, such as 10% off Apple products, 6% off Argos, 8% off ASOS, and that's just the A's.

You can buy digital vouchers to spend in supermarkets, such as Asda, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, and the digital vouchers are great for big ticket purchases, such as 7.5% off PC World.

Finally, you can link your credit/debit card to get instant savings in some restaurants, which may be useful once they open back up.



### I want to sign up to Perkbox!

Just click [here](#) to complete a form, to request an account



**EXCELLENCE.**  
**DEDICATION.**  
**AMBITION.**  
**INTEGRITY.**  
**TRADITION.**