

*The magazine of Creative Education Trust schools* Issue no.26 December 2021

# Connected

## ...To The World

On The Town

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Sixteen schools break ground on a new project

Fixpertise

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What IT colleagues learned and didn't learn at school

Subjectivity

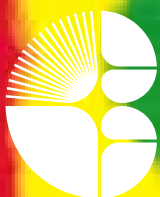
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New leads for English, maths and science

Plus

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New Principals' first 100 days; Shakespeare in preparation; festive card round-up and news from the schools



# The First 100 Days

Creative Education Trust welcomed new Principals to schools in Nottingham, Wellingborough and Milton Keynes in September. Each shared with *Connected* their background experience, their first impressions and their ambitions for the future of the schools in their charge.

## Gordon Farquhar The Milton Keynes Academy

I was recruited from the executive headship of three schools on the borders of Essex, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire, which had merged under my direction. Before that I'd been Headteacher of an academy in Essex – founded in the same year as the Spanish Armada (1588) – and earlier in my career, a teacher of PE and history.

I was attracted to Creative Education Trust by the vision expressed in things like Knowledge Connected. I've always looked to work in areas where you can really make a difference and change lives and, in this respect, I liked the look of Milton Keynes. I immediately saw the school's potential. The kids and the staff needed clarity and direction, and the school needed to re-assert its identity after the disruptions of Covid. The key change I saw as necessary was not any re-writing of rules and policies, but rather the protocols and procedures (such as line-ups and fire drills) to make them effective.

This school is genuinely a remarkable, caring community, in which the students are comfortable in their differences from each other and proud of their diversity. We need to capture this openness during the window before the cliques become intractable – my experience tells me they're well and truly formed by year 11. The quantity of resource, effort and passion that goes into safeguarding struck me as another bonus, especially a level of awareness among non-teaching staff that I just haven't witnessed anywhere else.

I've found that the Trust will say what it wants, but give me the autonomy to deliver it. I can diverge from other Principals about how it should be achieved, and the conversation is encouraged. Meanwhile, the future isn't about what I see, but what the school wants. We need to harness the voices of students, staff, the community and the Trust to define the USP we're after. Judging from the paper here on my desk that students just wrote in defence of wearing durags, bonnets and bandanas with their uniform, they're in a position to contribute articulately to that vision.



## Brad Nash The Bulwell Academy

Arriving from headships with the Greenshaw and United Learning Trusts in the Southwest of England, I saw the immense potential among the staff and students for Bulwell to be one of the best schools in Nottinghamshire. My immediate objective was to simplify processes and systems, such as Behaviour or Teaching and Learning, to create a better environment for learning. Another example was the system for embedding the Creative Education Trust curriculum. We needed a better platform for those things to be done well.

I've been impressed by the tenacity and curiosity of Bulwell students, and their impeccable manners. When I say "Hello" and ask how they are, I get a full answer, not a dismissive response. To a visitor, it 'feels' great: a purposeful environment, as if the students know the place works in their interest. Year 11, in particular, seem eager to take up any opportunity they're offered.

The Trust is clear about the learning experience it wants for students. My experience in similar schools tells me that to get kids to buy in to the learning culture we need to instil pride in a wide range of achievements. Champions don't just emerge from classrooms, but on stage, on the playing field and in the social community within and beyond the school. I want this school nationally recognised for the arts, sports and all the other stuff that doesn't show up in the league tables. If kids have the chance to feature, to really shine in something, the maths and English will follow.

## Marianne Blake Wrenn School

When I first drove up to the Wrenn façade, steeped in a hundred years of heritage, I encountered teachers and leaders dedicated to improving the life chances of the young people they serve by working at this school. I was both inspired and excited by the potential for what we could achieve.

The small things matter because they signify our high expectations. So from my Day One, we've focused on the basics: the students look smart and 'Proud to be Wrenn' (uniform infringements have gone from 120 down to single figures); we've removed distractions from learning in all areas of the school and we're succeeding in creating a disruption-free environment in lessons.

As a community we understand that after the last two years, we can't rely on the assumptions of life before Covid. We've reintroduced the idea of 'Healthy Challenge', supporting each other to question the processes, strategies, systems, ways and means that we've always used. Colleagues in all roles have embraced this seamlessly, and we see the way forward in marginal gains and quick wins that will help us to support success for all pupils. The split site provides us with unique opportunity to strengthen our culture of academic success from KS3.

It's a student-centred community that doesn't shy away from difficult conversations, resists fads and greatly respects the local community. We want to be known as a beacon of excellence. Young people have one opportunity at education, and our duty of care is to create a culture for learning that will enable them to develop personally and succeed academically.



**At the eleventh hour, the 8th annual Creative Education Trust Shakespeare festival was paused for safety. But in recognition of what's gone into producing eleven punchy, 30-minute retellings of the Bard's stories – not to mention to keep our audiences baited for the postponed event – here is a tribute to the hard work and expertise of the companies of pupils and staff.**

A choice of expertly abridged versions, which bring each play down to a sharp 30-minutes, always guarantees a good mix of comedy, tragedy and history. But how do you go about choosing which play for your students – especially when, for five schools, this was to be their eighth performance in the festival? **Abbeyfield** production director and Head of Sixth Form, **Rachael Dedman**, was keen to choose something new, and in fact, picked a work that many teachers will not immediately be familiar with: *The Winter's Tale*. **Hannah Lucas**, Drama Teacher at **Lynn Grove**, took a different approach: "After the rough two years we have had, I wanted a play with a happy ending: *The Tempest* was the one."

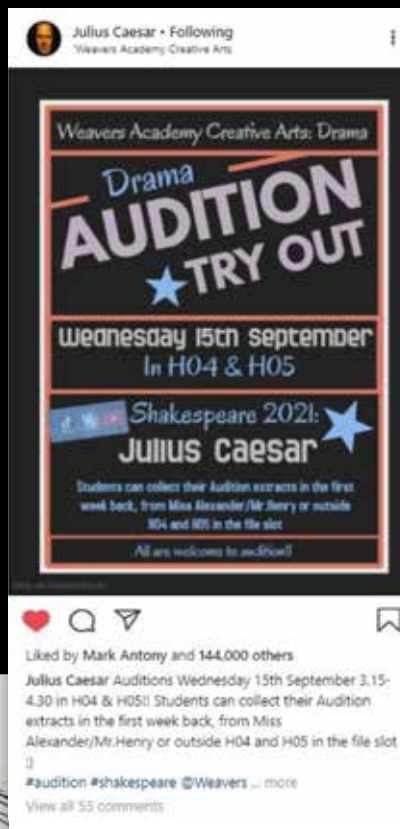
Choosing a play wasn't Hannah's only challenge as a new member of staff, and an early career teacher (ECT): "Nothing puts the fear into an ECT like introducing Shakespeare in the first term! But I found the students already had a good grasp of some Shakespeare plays and responded to my introduction to *The Tempest* with a great level of interest."

With the plays decided, it's time to build a team. "We 'advertise' but it's mainly face-to-face conversations with students that engages their interest", said **Lynsey Alexander**, Acting Head of Creative and Visual Arts at **Weavers**. "Our biggest draw is showing previous performances to students or, even better, hearing other students' feed back what a great time they had doing it. We develop a 'drama family' with the students who work on extra-curricular projects like this with us."

*"The whole experience has really heightened the profile of drama in the academy."*

## SPEAKING THE BARD

It can't be denied that Shakespeare can be hard, and it can be daunting. Performers and their teachers benefit from a full day workshop led by a theatre professional (recruited by our partner agency HMDT Music), to develop their vocal delivery and interpretation of text. Actor Ryan Early left quite an impression on the students of **Caister**. "It was such a privilege for them to be able to work with a professional", said **Philippa Everett**, Drama Teacher. "They had the time to really delve into the text, which certainly benefitted our rehearsal process and overall experience of making a show."



Costume designs for **Milton Keynes'** production of *The Tempest*.



The cast of *Romeo & Juliet* rehearse at **Hart**.



**Weavers'** dress rehearsal of *Julius Caesar*. **Kieran Dunkling** as Brutus.

Below, a colourful crown for **Ash Green's** *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.



Below, **Mark Friend** works with **Abbeyfield** sixth form students, **Saniya** and **Kyrat**.



## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

Watching a school's performance, you're only seeing half of the participating students. Behind the scenes of each, a design team has considered how best to convey scene, mood, character and action with limited time, money, and means. **Mark Friend** (another HMDT Music recruit) is the designer we send in to support them. His crash course in Key Concept Meaning always starts with costume. Sketches are made, placing characters side by side to explore relationships and connections, to be expressed in what they wear or carry. Mark argues keenly for a reason behind every decision: "Everything seen on stage must be in support of the storytelling," and nothing should be purely decorative.

**Milton Keynes'** production of *The Tempest* places the action on 'Refugee Island' in the year 2051. To pull off this bold concept required a close, working relationship between the drama and art departments. **Kristal Watkins**, drama teacher, explains: "The design team, enthusiastic volunteers in years 9 and 10, meet regularly to refine ideas and create the props and costumes. They check in with the director to take in any new developments and make sure we're all on the same wavelength."

Some schools take design in a different direction. "We want to make our audience feel uncomfortable", explained **Chris Collington**, Assistant Principal and director of **Ellis Guilford's** production of *Othello*. "People should feel something in a theatre, but the feeling doesn't have to be a nice one!" With a decision to deliberately unnerve, and a strong music technology programme, Chris and his students set about creating a soundscape. A single line of text, pulled and stretched using computer software to fifteen minutes, underscores the entire performance. Tense and dramatic moments are enhanced by increasing or decreasing the volume of the distorted noise – manipulated live, according to the pace of the action on stage, so that no performance is ever the same twice.



Costume planning and insignia design for **Ellis Guilford's** *Othello*

# BACKSTAGE



## Meet the experts

**HMDT Music** devised the Shakespeare Days of Performance for Creative Education Trust in 2014.

Twice winner of the prestigious Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Education and recipients of the 2020 Music and Drama Education Award for Excellence in Music Theatre, HMDT Music is a leader in developing inspiring arts projects that support other areas of learning. Projects in partnership with Creative Education Trust since 2013 include: New Folk in Town, a folk-song writing, composition and performance project for the centenary of the composer Benjamin Britten; We'll Meet Again, a music theatre piece commemorating the Second World War, accompanied by art exhibitions; and in 2018, Theory of Everything Creative, a new song-writing project prompted by the six key concepts of Knowledge Connected. HMDT Music has also worked with all the Trust primaries on its most recent national project STEM Sisters, which celebrates historical women in STEM through a multi-media puppet musical, science workshops and supporting resources.



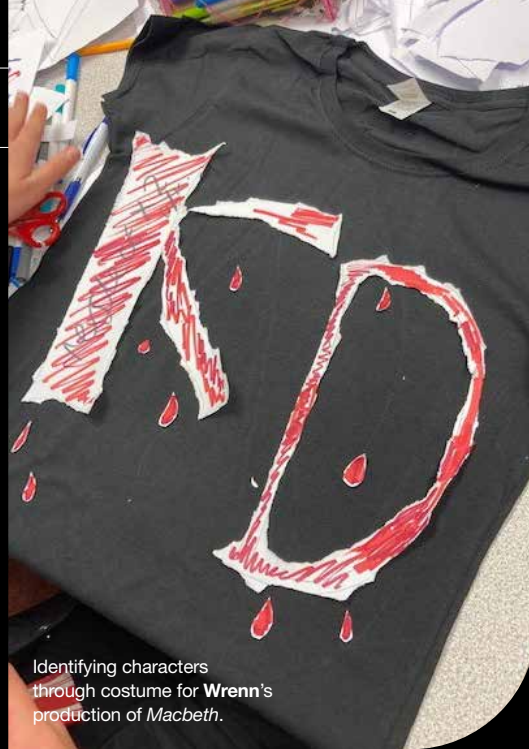
### Mark Friend

As a theatre design graduate from Wimbledon School of Art Mark Friend worked as Associate Designer to Alison Chitty on many productions, including Peter Hall's Bacchae at the National Theatre, and for the Festival of Epidavros, Greece. He designed King John for Sir Trevor Nunn after assisting John Napier on Nunn's Wars of the Roses. He will be directing Ody and Penny in 2022 as co-artistic director of the Paint the Lyric Festival in Ithaca, Greece along side fabrication and performance workshops.



### Ryan Early

Ryan trained as an actor at Drama Centre London and has worked extensively in theatre, television and film. He has performed in over 50 plays for BBC Radio 4 and 3 and has played Lee Bryce regularly in the BBC's longest-running drama, The Archers.



Identifying characters through costume for Wrenn's production of *Macbeth*.

### WATCH THIS SPACE

**The final performances are postponed, but not forgotten. Keep following *Connected* to find out when you'll be able to watch them broadcast to the comfort of your own school.**



### Katie Lewis

Katie trained at Birkbeck College on the MFA in Theatre directing. She has worked as assistant and resident director for the Royal Shakespeare Company, Theatre Royal Bath and National Theatre and has directed plays at the Library Theatre Manchester, Edinburgh Festival Fringe, Old Red Lion Theatre and Arcola Theatre.

# Subjectivity

The Education team hit a new milestone in recruiting subject specialists to lead English, maths and science across the Creative Education Trust network. *Connected* caught up with **Sam Davey**, **Craig Latimir** and **Pav Aujla** on where they're coming from, what drew them to the job, the place of subject specialism in today's teaching and learning context, and their plans for the months ahead.

### PAVANDEEP AUJLA HEAD OF SCIENCE

Pav concurs that education allows people to move forward regardless of their socio-economic status or parents. "For me", she adds, "a career in education fitted in with my Sikh background culture of helping others and giving back to society. I considered law, but it just didn't seem to have scope for impact on the same scale." She arrived in her new role after seven years as an Assistant Principal with Harris Federation academies in London, line managing different subjects and curriculum areas, year group and whole school projects, including Careers.

Pav recalls that in her early role as a teacher of science, and later Head of Department, "my subject always felt like the short straw drawn in the senior leadership group vis-à-vis English and maths." Not only was the Creative Education Trust job an opportunity to make a big impact on the quality of education and the development of teachers, but it was also "an invitation to focus just on science, no longer the ugly sister of English and maths, at a time when we face a crisis of recruitment and quality teaching." She adds that there's been a shift in education towards didactic teaching; a recognition that the subject expert should be doing most of the talking in the classroom.

Her first goal was to make the science teachers feel part of a community. To enrich the Academic Community and their curriculum bridging work, she set up email feeds for regular dispatches, and got to work on three longer-term projects. The Science Portal, "a one-stop-shop for good practice," went live after the summer. The KS4 Go-To-Guides have been published to support especially those who are teaching science as non-specialists. The Science Leadership Programme is "designed to replace the middle leadership experience that many Heads of Department missed out on because they were promoted on the basis of good teaching practice."

Meanwhile science, Pav enthuses, "contains all sorts of opportunities for young people to see themselves in the subject." Two priorities, then, for "lighting these sparks". First, a brilliant Key Stage 3 to establish a secure understanding of science not led by any particular examination board. "Until now, space usually had about 3 hours in the timetable, but now year 9 will have 12 lessons! And of course we have to talk about diversity – how Rosalind Franklin got jilted by out of the frame by the greater readiness in the 1960s to acknowledge Crick and Watson." The other priority is in-house CPD in everything from Early Career Teachers to volunteering, "so that everyone aligns to Trust values, has opportunities to develop and has no need ever to look elsewhere!"

# science





## SAM DAVEY HEAD OF ENGLISH

Sam joined Creative Education Trust from a North-London academy where she was Assistant Head for Curriculum, and prior to that, Head of English. She loved having the opportunity to raise the aspirations and attainment of students from a particularly deprived area, and this drive to see all students succeed, regardless of background, led her to us.

Sam brings acute experience of diversifying the curriculum, and is keen to help expand the range of texts studied in CET schools. "Determined that the KS3 curriculum should be representative of the demographic we served" she's introducing? BAME voices and extracts from contemporary writers such as Reni Eddo Lodge's *'Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People about Race'* and *'We Should All Be Feminists'* by the Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. She also finds ingenious ways to connect ancient classics on the syllabus with currents of contemporary feeling. It might be the anthology *Refugee Tales*, which took inspiration from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in telling the stories of under-represented and 'voiceless' people; or it might be linking the 'Me Too' movement to the Edwardian social class drama *An Inspector Calls*. "I think that through the teaching of literature, an opportunity is given to begin to bridge cultural poverty, making the in-class experience relevant to an ever-changing world outside the classroom."

On striking the balance between teaching skill and subject knowledge, Sam reflects: "The two are a golden combination. Teachers with sound pedagogical practice are always sought after for their understanding of how to engage students and impart learning, as well as their skill in assessing whether it has been learnt effectively. While some take the view that gaps in subject knowledge can be filled through training and resourcing, the best practitioners are aware of the gaps, and will research, read and seek support from colleagues where they need to."

Her 'watchword' for good and outstanding schools is consistency of approach, and her ambition is for all the English teams to achieve it while retaining the individuality and autonomy that makes us 'creative'.

# English



*"Literature gives an opportunity to bridge cultural poverty with classroom experiences relevant to an ever-changing world."*

# Maths



*"Getting stuck, getting awestruck, and learning together by helping each other, is crucial for any department."*

## CRAIG LATIMIR HEAD OF MATHS

Having driven progress as a head of department, Craig was satisfied that what he'd put in place was sustainable. "I knew what I was good at" he says, "and the chance to scale it up doesn't come across very often in schools – typically you just climb the ladder within your own school." He was drawn to the chance to work with multiple schools and have a positive impact on tens of thousands of students.

Craig has spent the term getting into almost every school and meeting the teams, while making adjustments to the maths curriculum. He vouches for the "constant inspiration" in his colleagues' "ability to scrutinise new plans, adapt them to their setting and enact them." Aware of the risk of getting bogged down in fixing things, he's been struck by the evidence of two major strengths: twin passions for the subject and the students; and the humility with which everyone seeks out ways to improve.

The pandemic has meant two years of unstable and incomplete learning for students. The biggest challenge now is "battling against this for our current exam cohorts, and as we progress back to national exams, limiting the impact as much as possible." There are special conditions around his subject in this context: "maths teachers with a maths degree are fairly rare", he explains, "so there are parts of the maths course that people haven't seen for a long time or in some cases never." Because maths staff can feel out of their depth mathematically, it's crucial that departments regularly do maths together – "getting stuck, getting awestruck, and learning by helping and developing together, is crucial for any maths department." He is convinced of the value of embracing different starting points in the quest for deeper subject knowledge and better pedagogy.

Uncovering, sharing and celebrating all the in-house excellence in the schools, and finding mechanisms to embed it is "a big thing on my radar", he declares, and ultimately, becoming the highest performing trust in terms of our maths results. For tens of thousands of students a year, a good maths grade not only represents a great skillset of solid numeracy, abstract reasoning and logical problem solving, it also opens life-changing doors that would otherwise be closed. "I don't think every student should base their dreams on going to a top tier university, but I think it is our duty to keep that option open."



# On the TOWN

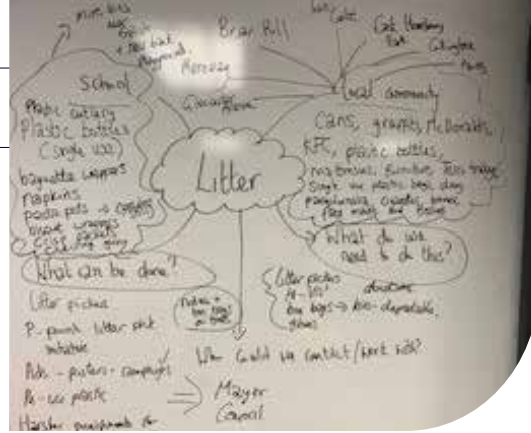
**Creative Education Trust's strategic goal under 'community' is for schools to become 'active and valued participants in their localities'. A new initiative agreed by the Board supports this endeavour, inviting each school to submit a bid for a student-led project that delivers benefit to the community beyond the school. After the disruption of the pandemic, this is an opportunity to bring communities together and create a long-lasting impact.**

To launch Our Town the Programmes team joined forces with Edge Foundation, experts in Community Connected Learning, to deliver training to all project leads. **Laura Hay**, Strategy and Partnerships Manager, presented case studies and activities that utilise the power of young people and enable them to connect the classroom to the world around them. "It comes down to what we value in education. If we believe students should not just learn about the world but also have opportunities to actively engage with and shape it, then we have to design for that. These experiences help students develop the knowledge, skills, mindsets, and habits to participate meaningfully in the local story, and most importantly, to realise their potential to play a positive and valued role in change," Laura said.

The **Bulwell Academy** Changemakers



A changemaker is someone – anyone – who sees a problem, steps up, and takes creative action to solve it for the good of all.



The overwhelming student response from **Abbeyfield's** survey was "we need to clean up our town".

Activities developed by Programmes and Edge help students consider what issues they care about, the root causes of the problems they see in their community, and the impact they want. The first draft bids show a range of brilliant ideas developed by Creative Education Trust students, including a reading bus offering texts mirroring the diversity of the community, a youth club, community gardens to address food poverty, initiatives to support positive mental health and wellbeing, others to protect the environment from litter and pollution, and projects promoting equality and allyship. We've been impressed by fantastic contributions and enthusiasm from students. **Sandip Dosanjh**, project lead at **Hart**, reported that her students are "absolutely dedicated to becoming changemakers in their town" as they plan the 'Celebration of Difference' event in partnership with Rugeley Town Council.

*"I feel this can last, and really give us something to be proud of as a school"*

Engaging with the local community is an essential requirement of Our Town. **Ellis Guilford** is working with Derbyshire based mental health company Infinite Wellbeing to design and deliver sessions for staff, students, and community members, while **Woodlands** is working with Bradwell Parish Council on protecting the environment from the dangers of litter. The winning designs from the school's poster competition may feature on the new Bradwell bins! The **Caister** team are working closely with a local group, Caister Cares, made up of representatives from local charities, enterprises and churches. Archie Hill, Year 8, spoke warmly about "a time where we can come together, getting all their ideas into one to make Caister a better place."

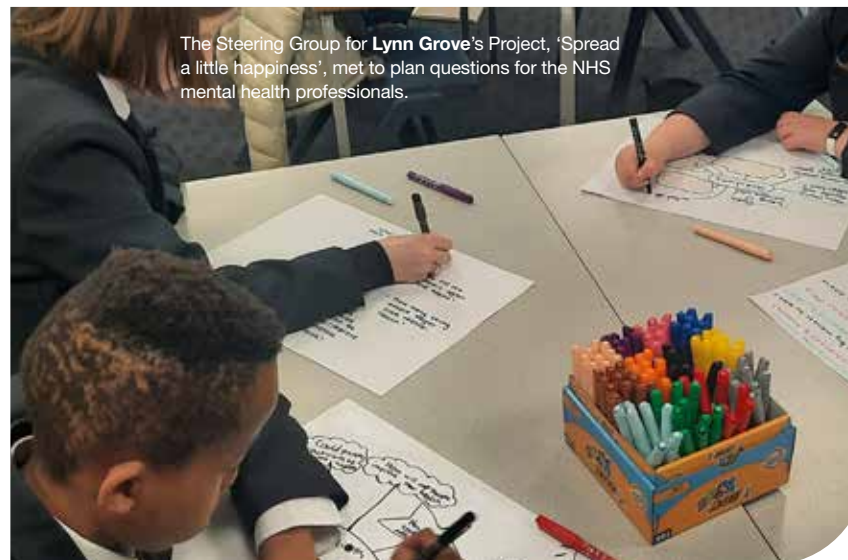
The funds for each project will be confirmed by the end of term, and we're excited to see the next steps. Lynsey Knighton, year 11 at **Bulwell**, captured a widespread feeling of creativity and hope: "I feel this can last, and really give us something to be proud of as a school. Most importantly, we'll be helping our community."



The **Hart School's** project team: "It is exciting knowing that one of our ideas will actually make a difference to the town".



The **Caister Kids Care** group create mind maps on what community means to them, encouraged by visitors from the Caister Cares committee.



The Steering Group for **Lynn Grove's** Project, 'Spread a little happiness', met to plan questions for the NHS mental health professionals.

Students from **Harpfield Primary** share their visions for a reading bus.



The Going Greener map, produced by **Weavers' Eco** Ambassadors, to drive forward the initiative Good to Grow, which uses the community fund to invest in a greenhouse and poly-tunnels for fresh produce and cooking classes, improving wellbeing and promoting healthy eating in the community.



The **Wroughton** group: "If we tidy this space, we can use it to grow healthy food."



# #ixpertise

IT is a cross-Trust service team whose expertise has kept pace with astonishing developments in network technology over the last ten years. Several of their stories bear testimony to a sector that has made unequivocal success of apprenticeships. School-leaver business administration trainees, a teenage system pirate and a fledgling theatre arts technician now find themselves at the centre of the major strategic priority for this and every organisation. How did their education serve them, and how should school best prepare young people for the technological world?



*“Access for everyone is the critical thing: hardware and an internet connection. We still have a way to go.”*

## Adam Millerchip, ICT Systems Manager

At school, I was fascinated by network computers, and wanted more than the school was willing or able to give me. We only had access to a megabyte of disk space, so I tried to get more by logging in as the administrator, and other acts of juvenile IT piracy. Our first home computer had a dial-up modem. I spent many late nights on the bulletin board server system – the forerunner of web pages – finding access to other drives and software. My early learning about networks was through these systems, and the more I knew, the more I wanted to know. While completing my four A-levels I taught myself early programming in Visual Basic, because no-one at school could teach me ICT to an A-level standard. I did an Advanced NVQ as an IT technician under one of the first Modern Apprenticeship Schemes at Dudley College. After qualifying, I went into retail, creating point-of-sale systems for Reebok stores all over Europe and the UK. I learned by asking questions in all my workplaces, and I really believe in the right to learn as you work.

Looking back, I can see how much more we know than in the days when school was ‘English and maths... and everything else’. I’m glad to see greater access to things I didn’t have – 1:1 device schemes for hardware, and industry-standard software like Pro-Tools, Sibelius and the Adobe Creative Suite, which used only to be available through nefarious means. But access for everyone is the critical thing: hardware and an internet connection. We still have a way to go.



*“Much of my education was a natural progression of growing up and maturing as the IT industry around me did.”*

## Jordan Midgley, Regional IT Manager

Playtime and sports were what I went to school for. I never felt like I had enough encouragement to make me pay attention and be better at school. I re-took a couple of GCSEs in my last year and did quite well – that was a good year, doing a bit of catch-up with a nice group. When I dropped out of college – I was so easily distracted and couldn’t engage – I got a lucky break and things started to go upwards. The Doncaster Council apprenticeship scheme placed me into a secondary school at the age of 17. It was pretty scary, but I got my NVQ, and then a permanent contract as the only

technician at the lower school site. I stayed for four and a half years, getting a lot of skills and knowledge by firefighting urgent issues at the deep end. I moved to a senior IT technician job at a special school in Leicester, and became the network manager after two years.

During this full time work I studied for five years to get a degree in Computing and IT through The Open University. This was not only a massive achievement for me after the struggle of school, but gave me an insight into how technology can support students in the academic domain. I have a few specialist qualifications too, but much of my education was a natural progression of growing up and maturing as the IT industry around me did. Ways of working were changing fast, demanding more and more of the systems all the time. The customer service attitude is critical in IT; mine was founded on coaching and mentoring earlier in my career, and learning how to treat everyone equally. From my technical perspective and as a father, I believe children growing up in a very technological world need computer science in the curriculum from a young age, and with scope for creativity.

*“They’re so much less visible than other career and training routes; I can’t believe we don’t talk about them more”*



## Connor Wigg, Senior Regional IT and Cloud Services Technician

I was an average kid at school; no trouble to anyone, but I spent too much time in the IT suite. I built my first PC at the age of about ten. But I hated studying IT when I got to college – it just didn’t suit my practical learning style. So I left for an apprenticeship in the imaging department of the local hospital, fixing the X-ray and MRI and Ultrasound equipment. After eighteen months, I went to Wroughton as the ICT technician, joining a network of 17 schools.

A lot of the stuff I learned, I taught myself, and ‘hands-on’ was always more helpful to me than reading a book. Because there are plenty of kids in school like me, I would really push apprenticeship schemes. They’re so much less visible than other career and training routes; I can’t believe we don’t talk about them more. I didn’t leave school aware that any of that existed, but once I got my apprenticeship, it helped me shape myself and know who I was: now a senior member of staff for a national academy trust!



*“We look for people that have that customer service orientation – the bit that can’t be learned as fast as the technical things”*



### Adam Johnson, Cloud Services Manager

At Mereway [the predecessor to Abbeyfield], I was in the technical team for the theatre and, convinced that this would be my future, didn't do great in other areas of school work. I went straight into a touring company for a few years when I left at 16, then when I was made redundant, I was asked to step in at Abbeyfield. A few hours here and there turned into months, then a permanent full-time job as a theatre technician doing reprographics and a bit of IT on the side. After Ash Mudaliar joined the school, the Head moved me into IT, and pretty soon Creative Education Trust arrived on the scene as well. In 2014 I found myself part of the fledgling team migrating all the schools onto a central system.

Seven years later, I'm involved in recruiting to the team, and we look for people that have that customer service orientation – the bit that can't be learned as fast as the technical things. I like to think this is what Ash saw in me, way back. There are a lot of stakeholders in what we do, and I challenge myself to meet their different expectations. I've always pushed myself to deal with what is difficult, rather than back off from it. I remember finding myself, quite junior, seated among the executives at the first Head Office Christmas lunch. I saw it as a chance to learn and grow, to bust the myth of 'senior' people who are, after all, human.

For our students today, I'm most excited about their access to the means to work how they want to, in the way that's right for every child. It's not fully evolved, but we're getting there.



*“A careers questionnaire disclosed that I might succeed as a gas meter reader! I knew I could do better”*

### Michael Brown, Senior IT Technician

I didn't do badly at school; studied hard and did well. I started a college course in business and administration, but switched to an apprenticeship, and ended up designing conservatories in AutoCAD (3D drawing software). The small local business I worked for constantly had problems with their computer and printer. Fixing these devices, I discovered that I had an aptitude for fixing. My level 2 badminton coach qualification led me to volunteer at a special needs school, where the IT manager suggested my second qualification via a three-year apprenticeship as an IT technician. As a break from these studies, I spent a year as cabin crew on commercial flights to Europe and beyond – Cuba and India.

School got me through some hard times as a kid, and let me see the light at the end. It definitely gave me the tools to study and to shape my career, and I value that part of my life. But growing up in a small town in Devon limited our exposure to the world of work. When I first left school I thought I wanted to be an accountant, but a period of work experience put me right off, and I had literally no idea what I wanted to do. A careers questionnaire disclosed that I might succeed as a gas meter reader! I knew I could do better, but looking at jobs as a teenager, you don't know what you need to get there. I found my own first apprenticeship, frustrated by the lack of practical stuff in my college course. Looking back, it would have been nice if companies had taken more of an interest in schools and showcased the jobs available. Schools' promotion of apprenticeships ought to be as prominent as it is for university.



### Gary O'Connor, Regional IT Manager

As a result of a job in customer service for the local branch of Hoseasons, the holiday company, I fell into IT at the age of 20 when I was asked to work on the 'Millennium bug'. I had to work with the boatyards and park owners to make sure we were protected against system shutdowns on the turn of 1999–2000. I went on to assist with the call centre telephone system and then secured the job of Mainframe Operator without further qualifications.

*“If children had a problem with their X-Box, they'd figure out how to fix it, and we need this sense of competence with computers.”*

I got really interested in the hands-on, technical side of IT and moved into a role for Great Yarmouth Borough Council, getting my HNC System Practitioner qualification in a year, and a certification through the Cisco Network Academy which the Council had sponsored me to complete on day-release to the City College. When it became clear that IT would become an outsourced service I jumped ship into education as an IT Engineer for Norfolk County Council for several years, then left education temporarily to be a Senior Infrastructure Technician for the East of England ambulance service. My job was to maintain the 999 system – a super-complicated set-up with hundreds of servers and multiple call centres. I returned to schools briefly before being recruited by Creative Education Trust, drawn to this more strategic, customer-focused, regional role which is less hands-on than much of my 20-year career has been.

I would make basic IT skills a priority in schools today, not just programming, which gets a lot of attention. Troubleshooting depends on knowing more or less how a computer works. If children had a problem with their X-Box, they'd figure out how to fix it, and we need this sense of competence with computers. They also need all kinds of basic life skills, like how to wash their clothes and cook a roast dinner.



*“A network outage 13 years ago might have inconvenienced a couple of administrative staff; nowadays it could shut down a school.”*

### Daniel Shilito, Regional IT Manager

I'm very much a product of the Rugeley school system, having attended Hagley Park High School (which merged with Fair Oak to form The Hart School in 2016) and the Aelfgar Centre (sixth form). Although I had the results, I chose not to go to uni because I had no idea what I wanted to do career-wise. After sixth form I spent a year working full-time at the garden centre where I'd had a Saturday job since year 9. While I was ordering stock one day, the former Head of IT at Hagley Park recruited me as an assistant technician on a recommendation from my sixth form teacher. I'm now into my fourteenth year and fourth job title: Lead IT Technician, Technical Support Coordinator, Senior IT Technician and (now) Regional IT Manager. In parallel with my career, IT has evolved from a minor support role to mission-critical service. A network outage 13 years ago might have inconvenienced a couple of administrative staff; nowadays it could shut down a school.

My GNVQ and A-Level in IT helped me to help others, but the real learning about human interaction, networking and customer service happened outside school and on the job. Looking back at my own education, it's the life experiences, not the classroom, that come first to mind – a field trip to the Holderness coast to study coastal erosion, a windy residential on the Welsh borders, a trip over to France. It was on these residential trips that we built relationships; not just friendships with our peers but mutual respect with our teachers.

If I could change anything in schools, it would be to open more doors and keep them open for as long as possible. Students need a real flavour of different careers; whether through work experience, away days or experts from different fields coming in to talk. I might have quite liked to learn a trade, but because I was 'academic', those routes were never discussed with me. And the buzz term this year is 'levelling up'. My view is that school trips, school meals and one-to-one technology should be universal; with a voluntary contribution made by those parents who can afford it.

*In the background: photos of the now demolished Rugeley Power station at dawn by Dan Shilito and the Hart's Senior Technician, John Edge.*



**In this issue of *Connected* we hear from Ben Francoise, Abbeyfield alum and member of their Academy Council, who recently returned to Northampton to set up his own social enterprise.**

After years of travelling with work, Ben recently returned to Northampton to set up the social enterprise Saints Coffee with his partner Nicola. It's about 'coffee with purpose'; giving back to the community with a social impact in three areas: championing social justice, improving social mobility, and better mental health. Workshops for community members who hope to develop their employability skills, and minibus trips for those who wouldn't otherwise leave the house, are among the regular activities.

*“Think about an individual you want to have an impact on and build from there.”*

After a career in finance and management, including a leadership role in risk management across Asia Pacific from Hong Kong, setting up a social enterprise felt like a natural step. “I wanted to see the impact of what I was doing; to work in the community to tackle severe isolation, to raise aspirations in schools, and to help people feel more ready for work”. Ben considered setting up in a new city but was drawn to his hometown. “The more I thought about it, the more I realised that the opportunities I'd had were due to the people of Northampton”.

Ben's experiences at Mereway Upper School (now Abbeyfield) and Oxford University played a big part in his motivation to start a social enterprise. He enjoyed his time at school, where he studied maths, biology, and English literature at A level. But the transition to Oxford was stark. “I saw the difference in experience between the privileged students and me. Growing up, the expectations of what we could achieve were set. For others, their expectations were always limitless.” The difference continued beyond the final year when many students had access to law firms and consultancies. “I didn't know how to make that leap into a career”.

Ben now works with schools to change students' perceptions of what they can and can't do. He encourages them to consider university. “I had an excellent education at Oxford and was taught by the people who wrote the textbooks,” he reflects, but the main thing he would change is his subject choice, Economics and Management. “I should have chosen something I was really passionate about. There are few vocations for which you need a specific degree.” Whatever route students choose, Ben's advice is to get started early. “We need to raise aspirations as soon as possible by making students aware of their options”.

With the proposals for the Our Town Social Action Fund coming through, we asked what Ben would recommend to students hoping to have an impact in their community. “Really develop an understanding of what you want to do and how to make it sustainable. Also, focus on just one thing. The very few people who get to change the world as an individual often have large platforms. Think about an individual you want to have an impact on and build from there.” When setting up Saints Coffee, Ben thought about the support he needed when he was growing up, and he thought of a community member who would often chat to students as they went to school just to have someone to speak to. “She needed something like the Coffee in the Community programme we now run.”

Find out more about Saints Coffee: [www.saintscoffee.co.uk](http://www.saintscoffee.co.uk)  
Instagram: [@saintscoffee](https://www.instagram.com/saintscoffee)

# ALUMNI IN THE SPOTLIGHT



## Successes and special commendations

# Students

To **Caister's** year 7 and 8 students who came 2nd overall at the East Norfolk District Athletics competition.



To **Abbie and Ellie Holloway, Hart** alumni, who've raised money for Children in Need every year since 2009, won the Sir Terry Wogan Fundraiser of the Year Award in 2017 and are completing a 50-mile tandem cycle!



To **Olivia Hepworth, Harpfield** year 6, for her superb athletic achievements and gold medals for Stoke athletics club – at the end of the track season she is U11 3rd in the UK and 1st in the West Midlands!

To **Bulwell's** year 7 and 8 students who took part in a virtual book launch with author and cartoonist Jeff Kinney for the 16th *Wimpy Kid* book, *Big Shot*, with a Q&A, creative activities and an exclusive peek at the new DisneyPlus film.



To the year 10 Architecture students at **Bulwell**, for their freehand drawing and watercolour interpretations of famous architectural landmarks.



To **Beth Dunn** (right), and all the **Bulwell** year 11s who organised a fundraising event in memory of Beth's brother Kristopher, raising £225 for 'When You Wish Upon a Star', the charity for children with life-threatening illnesses.



To **Chennai Pink**, year 11 at **Weavers**, who achieved her grade 7 Voice with full marks!



To **Helen D'Angelo**, for her tireless support of looked after children at **Abbeyfield**, where she is recognised as a great advocate and in the words of one year 7, "one of the kindest people I have ever met."

To the 30 **Hart** students who took part in the 'scare fest' acting project at Deer Park farm to entertain the villagers, and have already been booked for next year!



# and staff



To **Nikkaya Campbell, Bulwell** year 11, for being a star student all round, and for contributing her poignant creative writing to the school.

### Suitable

The love we require is the love we desire, although sometimes the love we give is not the one we receive it is rather a different version - slightly twisted. yet our body does not reject it as we are consumed by the illusion. it is a perfect fit.

**Nikkaya Campbell**

To **Daisy May Williams, Wroughton** year 5, who achieved fifth place in the ISTD Grand Finals in Blackpool in both Ballroom and Latin, against a large number of competitors.

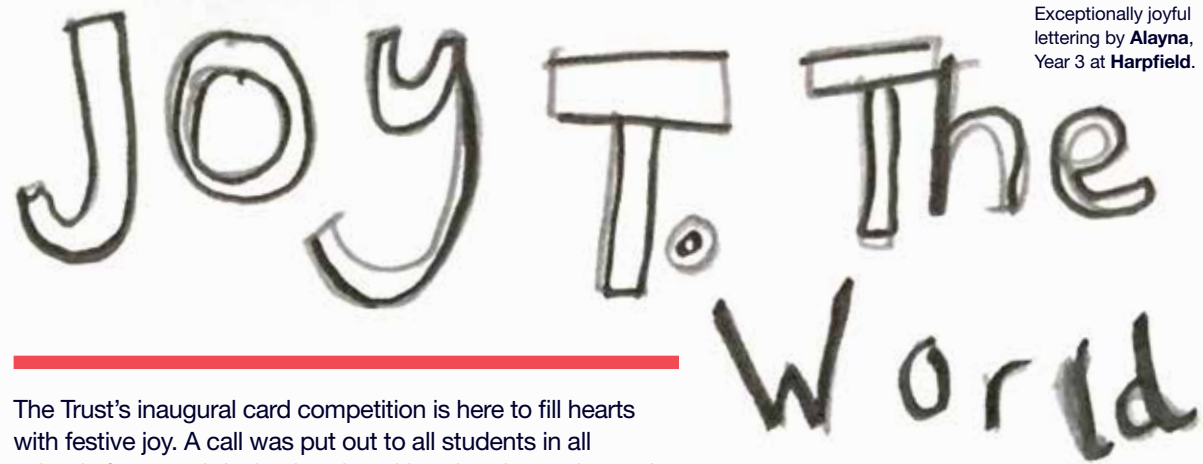


To the **Bulwell MoBros**, who grew moustaches for November and raised over £1,700 to help raise awareness of men's health.



To all the current and past students of the **Hart** who gathered in Rugeley on Remembrance Sunday.





Exceptionally joyful lettering by **Alayna**, Year 3 at **Harpfield**.

The Trust's inaugural card competition is here to fill hearts with festive joy. A call was put out to all students in all schools for a card design bearing either the phrase 'joy to the world', or 'peace on Earth'. A judging panel comprising the Directors of Education and Programmes, **Nicole McCartney** and **Emily Campbell**, and designer of *Connected*, **Nick Vincent**, had a tough job choosing a single winner.

The winning entry by **Madison** from Year 7 at **Milton Keynes** was praised by the judges for the steady hand with which she created a design that embodies the joy of the words it carries. Madison's work will be produced as a card to send out to friends of Creative Education Trust.

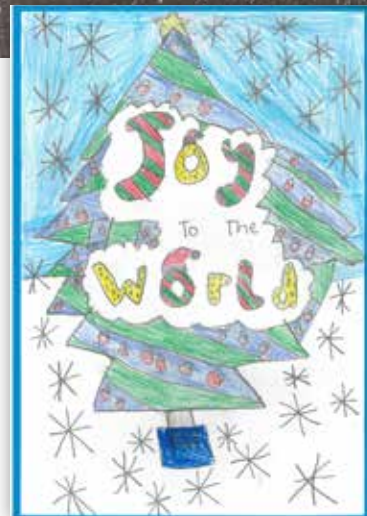


Wonderful line work from **Ellie**, Year 9 at **Bulwell**.

A bold concept carried off well by **Angel**, Year 8, **Hart**.



A beautiful, tonal reimagining of a scene from a festive film favourite from **Charlotte**, Year 10 at **Ash Green**.



Great organisation of elements by **Elsie**, Year 3, **Wroughton**.



Lovely lettering and a quality illustration from **Nancy**, Year 8 at **Ellis Guilford**.



Lovely crayon illustration by **Evelyn**, Year 12 at **Wrenn**.



# Save the date

## 4 January 2022

is the first ever all-staff development day for Creative Education Trust staff. Colleagues from all teams across the network will participate in the same developmental sessions on creativity, diversity and professional development, then chose from 95 half-hour presentations on key topics of wide relevance, each proposing a practical takeaway for the very next day's work.

Sign up [here](#) for your sessions.

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Front cover image:

"Joy" by **Madison**, Year 7,

**The Milton Keynes Academy**

*Connected* is designed by

**@VincentDesignUK**