



PENK VALLEY
ACADEMY TRUST

Learning Together

AN ACADEMIC YEAR IN REVIEW 2021-22



Looking back Looking forward

As we come to the end of a busy but productive academic year, I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on some of the challenges and successes of the last twelve months as well as some of our future priorities.

Whatever your role in Penk Valley Academy Trust – pupil, parent, employee, governor, Trustee - I firmly believe that our core values of **collaboration**, **challenge**, **care** and **curiosity** are integral to our approach to successfully educating and nurturing our children.

When I started here as CEO last September, I knew there was already a close productive relationship between colleagues, schools and the families and communities we all serve. I have seen this **collaboration** first hand and

am more certain than ever that our motto of **'learning together'** embodies the true spirit of Penk Valley Academy Trust.

During this year we have all worked together in dealing with the continued **challenges** of the Covid pandemic including the various repercussions on children's wellbeing as well as the many associated pressures we have faced as adults. Besides Covid, we have also seen real resilience and positivity in the way everyone has responded so constructively to changes such as those seen in government policy, staffing, the disruption of building projects or the return of formal exams and Ofsted inspections.

We have seen a real ethos of **care** in our

school communities as our children return to normal school life. It has been wonderful to see the resumption of those all-important activities and rituals that provide such positive memories of our school days. This has included school performances, trips, visiting speakers, work experience, charity fund raising and sports days, to name but a few.

Valuing **curiosity** signals our schools focus on teaching and learning. We are proud of how teachers, support staff and pupils have worked together to resume and catch up with their studies. 'Well done' to all pupils for their academic achievements and we wish the very best to year 11 and 13 pupils awaiting exam results. Schools have been constantly improving their curricula, but we know that we have more to do in terms of planning and training so that standards of teaching and learning are consistently amongst the very best in the country.

I would like to thank the hard-working staff in our schools and in the Trust central team, for everyone's commitment to improving the

quality of education still further. Also, a huge thank you to the families, Trustees, governors, external partners and local communities for all the support you give us – as always it is very appreciated.

I hope that you enjoy reading about a few of the many activities and achievements in our schools and trust and we look forward to another productive and successful academic year starting in September 2022.



COLLABORATION



CHALLENGE



CURIOSITY



CARE

Guest editor - Jasmine Debney

Throughout this magazine you may see some articles written by Jasmine Debney, our guest editor for this issue. Jasmine is a Year 12 student from Stafford who joined us in June for her work experience placement. Jasmine is a budding journalist, so in the spirit of our values of **collaboration** and **challenge**, we tasked her with writing three articles for this magazine.

Fond farewells Warm welcomes

This year we are saying goodbye to a number of people who have contributed so much to our schools and Trust over many years. We are also welcoming in new faces to join the next stage of our journey.

Trustees and Governors

Peter Davenport retired as our Vice-Chair of Trustees on 31 March 2022. Peter had held key governance roles since the 1990s and was the long-standing Chair of Governors at Penkridge Middle School before the Trust was formed. We wish Peter all the best for a relaxing retirement and would like to thank him for his many years of service.

To replace Peter we welcome a new Trustee to the board, Scott Williams. Scott has been a governor at Marshbrook First School where he is also a parent. Scott's professional background is in secondary education and he is currently Assistant Headteacher of a nearby school leading on SEND, behaviour and safeguarding.

Peter's Vice-Chair role has been filled by our

Trustee David Shipman. David is also a parent of a child in the Trust schools and has a wealth of experience as an engineer and senior project manager in the rail industry.

Alongside Peter, another one of our governors with many years of service will be leaving. Steve Burnham has been a governor at Marshbrook First School for many years and most recently has served as their Chair. Steve will be replaced as Chair of Governors by Sally Griffin, another of our experienced long-standing governors.

It is important for us to recognise that governors and Trustees give their time freely to support and challenge our schools and Trust. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our governors and Trustees for their support this year.

Headteachers and Executive Leaders

We are very sad to see Dawn Spiers retire as Headteacher at Marshbrook First School. Dawn's dedication, commitment, and loyalty to our schools over the past seventeen years

- first as Deputy at Princefield for three-and-a-half years and then as Headteacher at Marshbrook for thirteen-and-a-half years- has been second to none and she has worked tirelessly to ensure that Marshbrook First School is a tremendous school. From its operations, business systems, and organisation, through to inspirational and impactful teaching.

Taking over the reins from Dawn is Rebecca Nixon. Rebecca is a hugely experienced primary leader, currently deputy headteacher of a large primary school, and will be supported by a comprehensive induction and mentoring programme by the Trust.

We would also like to welcome Andy Grocutt into the post of Headteacher at Penkridge Middle School. Andy has been Deputy Headteacher at the school since 2019 and in May was successful in being appointed Headteacher. Andy is excited about the future for PMS and ambitious about its next steps.

From our central executive team, our Chief Finance Officer, Julie Ablewhite has retired from her full time role. Taking over from Julie

we now have two posts, focussing on the very important aspects of Finance and Human Resources.

Jan Marson will be stepping up to become Chief Finance Officer whilst Donna Harrison is now HR Manager.

Julie will still stay working for the Trust on a one-day-per-week basis for a year to ensure continuity of excellent practice, but also to act as an advisor to our schools to further develop and refine their business support services.

Recruitment

In addition to these changes we are welcoming over 20 new staff to the Trust in September in readiness for the new academic year. On Tuesday 12 July we held an induction day for them with briefings from the Executive Team about the vision of the Trust and other essential information. The staff then spent the remainder of their day with their 'home school', settling in and ensuring they can get off to the best possible start in the Autumn.

Building for the future

This year we've be delighted to have secured three major building projects through external funding.

The roofs at Penkridge Middle School and Wolgarston High School (C Block) have been replaced through the government's Condition Improvement Fund, whilst Princefield First School has received a brand-new two classroom extension and significant internal remodelling.

In terms of projects for next academic year we have some even better news. We have secured six individual projects for our school through the Condition Improvement Fund.

We will be installing brand-new heating systems at Wolgarston High School and The Rural Enterprise Academy and having new roofs installed at St John's CE First School, St Mary & St Chad CE First School, Marshbrook First School and The Rural Enterprise Academy. This is fantastic for our schools, ensuring that our buildings will all be safe, warm and dry.



At Princefield the KS1 and 2 classrooms have either been newly built or have been extensively remodelled. Work is still ongoing in the Reception classrooms in readiness for September





Young Environmentalist Winners 2022

Congratulations to the Wolgarston Eco-committee team who won the Rotary Club's Young Environmentalist competition. The national competition is an opportunity for young people to showcase their unique solutions to environmental problems and change the way we look, treat and interact with our environment.

Pictured are two members of the team, Isaac Morris and Minh-Anh Simkiss receiving their award.



Students thrive at 'Good' rated Wolgarston High School

by Jasmine Debney, Work Experience Guest Editor

After receiving a 'Good' rating following a recent inspection from Ofsted in May 2022, it's clear that by following the 'Wolgarston Way', both our students and teachers alike have perfectly presented the best of Wolgarston High School. Inspectors praised the academic curriculum and the personal development and behaviour.

Wolgarston's commitment to being a 100% school is fundamental to producing the very best young people. Inspectors praised valuable events held by the school such as the Year 9 Community Day and the humanities department's Diversity Day – events like these were found to have a positive influence on students' attitudes to the world around them.

The level of teaching observed by inspectors continues to be highly engaging and effective, leading to clear and consistent improvements immediately visible in the students' work. The report recognises that students achieve well across a broad range of subjects, learning in calm and orderly lessons where disruption is rare.

In terms of the future, we are continuously developing the Key Stage 3 curriculum for our Year 9 students – we are working closely with our local Middle Schools to ensure the full national curriculum is available for all students. To support transition, we are creating innovative and effective strategies that can be used to identify topics that Year 9 students should be able to understand and recall well.

Jo Fairclough, Headteacher, said "I've always believed that every young person has the ability to achieve great things. When I arrived in 2019, I emphasised the importance of sky-high expectations and exemplary behaviour in creating the very best environment for learning. I'm delighted that the Ofsted report recognises our efforts in achieving the 'highest standards of work and behaviour' alongside warm, positive relationships.

The inspection took place under a new framework and I am very proud that it draws attention to the expert teaching and exemplary behaviour as well as the wider opportunities to develop the 'Wolgarston Way' ethos.

We always aim continue to build on our success and one key action point was to complete the review of the Year 9 curriculum. This was identified as an area for development and work has been ongoing. We look forward to continuing our collaboration with Trust and local schools to ensure Wolgarston provides the very best education."

Read the full report on the Ofsted website <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/23/145381>



Pupil recruitment success

We are delighted that The Rural Enterprise Academy is becoming even more popular with families and our intake this September will be our biggest ever. With over 100 pupils joining from dozens of different schools, we are excited to meet them all and find out what passions they have for becoming the Rural and Environmental pioneers of the future.

In 2021 we opened our doors to Year 7 children for the first time and this September we will have two classes per year from Year 7 all the way through to Year 11.



Our unique curriculum

At The Rural Enterprise Academy, we have developed our own bespoke Environmental Science Key Stage 3 curriculum to ensure that every pupil gains a full understanding about the changing world around them. Each topic builds upon the one before to develop understanding of key concepts, teach rich knowledge, and build the skills that will be of great value in the workplaces of the future.

Alice Corrigan, Headteacher, said *“As the world finally wakes up to the impacts of climate change, we have grasped the opportunity to deepen our pupils understanding of the impact humans have had on the Earth. Our pupils have begun to question the current policies and actions of governments worldwide and we can already see the positive impact they will have on all of our futures.”*

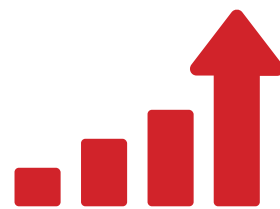
An example of the units in the Year 9 curriculum

Autumn 1	Autumn 2	Spring 1	Spring 2	Summer 1	Summer 2
The Impacts on planet Earth (Measuring impacts)	The Impacts on planet Earth (Atmosphere)	Environmental Communities and ecology	Changing organisms	Levels of organisation	Maintaining biodiversity
<p><i>Over the course of the years students will have developed an understanding of how humans have impacted planet earth.</i></p> <p><i>The topic allows students to demonstrate their understanding and apply this to a practical scenario.</i></p>	<p><i>Students have studied air pollution year 7 and will be able to identify combustion as a major source of pollution. This unit of work builds upon this knowledge and the work on Carbon sinks from year 8.</i></p> <p><i>The topic allows students to recognise the impacts of different air pollutants and develop an ability to assess air quality.</i></p>	<p><i>Students will learn to describe the factors that may affect the numbers or distribution of plants and animals in.</i></p> <p><i>a habitat. This builds upon knowledge acquired in KS2 science.</i></p> <p><i>The topic is ideally suited to investigative work using investigative planting and alike. It makes sense that this unit is delivered when there is an abundance of species to be sampled.</i></p>	<p><i>Evolution is a fundamental concept in ecology that gives rise to the huge variety of plant and animal life on earth.</i></p> <p><i>This unit of work allows students to assess the evidence for evolution and use the theory to explain changes in animal and plant populations over time. It builds upon the work students completed in year 8 on biodiversity.</i></p> <p><i>As evolution is an abstract concept, teaching this unit of work now allows students to appreciate the vast diversity of life on earth having studied a range of ecosystems previously.</i></p>	<p><i>Building upon the work in the KS2 programme of study for science, students will study the trophic levels within ecosystems.</i></p> <p><i>Trophic levels are an important concept in environmental ecology and demonstrate the makeup of ecosystems graphically. This unit of work is best delivered now to coincide with the delivery of photosynthesis in science. Students must appreciate the important role of photosynthesis to value the role of producers in food chains.</i></p>	<p><i>Having developed an understanding of the complex nature of interactions between humans and the environment, in this unit students will use their knowledge acquired over the course to explain the importance of biodiversity and how it can be maintained. The unit draws on knowledge from the impacts of consuming and the topic of climate change in year 7.</i></p>



Key Stage 2 SATs improvements made

- At 70.6% at or above the expected standard, maths is above the national average (1.6% above) and is an increase of 3.6% on the school's 2019 data
- At 74.6% at or above the expected standard, reading is in line with the national average (0.6% above) and is an increase of 2.6% on the schools 2019 data.
- At 71.1% at or above the expected standard, Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling is at the national average (0.9% below) but is a decrease of 2.9% on the schools 2019 data.



A key priority for Penkridge Middle School this academic year has been to improve outcomes for the KS2 SATs tests.

The tests are taken by all Year 6 pupils in England in Reading, Grammar, Punctuation & Spelling, Mathematics, and Writing.

As most Year 6 nationally attend a primary school where they are in their top year, traditionally middle schools have fared less well in SATs. In 2019, when the tests were last carried out due to Covid, Penkridge Middle School scored below the National Average figure in both reading and maths. As a result of this, a comprehensive approach was put in place consisting of new schemes of work that are nationally recognised for maths and reading, closer monitoring and subject reviews to ensure consistency across classes, new programmes of intervention and tutoring, and an increased focus on this priority from the Trust Board and CEO, down through the Local Governing Committee to the Senior Leadership Team of the School.

Whilst we are encouraged by the improving results the priority still remains for next year to ensure these key performance measures are met and improved on and every child has the best possible chance of success as they conclude their primary education.

Shakespeare Rocks!

*Review by Jasmine Debney,
Work Experience Guest Editor*

As part of my work experience with the Academy Trust, I had the privilege to watch the students perform 'Shakespeare Rocks', and, wow - they really did make Shakespeare rock!

The performance was electric, humorous and heart-warming all in one, and it was incredibly clear how much effort the students had put into rehearsing the show to perfection, as the result was the most charming school production I think I've ever seen!

The chemistry between the students on stage felt so genuine, and the musical aspects of the play sounded beautiful! The pupils sang passionately and confidently, bringing so much emotion to the songs in the show. I also thoroughly enjoyed the presence of the incredibly talented band - they added so much depth to the backing tracks, delivering a truly authentic sound.

Overall, I LOVED it! It was clear to see that the students involved gave it their all, and have certainly created a masterpiece of a school performance!

Thank you for letting me come and see the show!

Shakespeare Rocks was a production staged by the English and Music departments at Penkridge Middle School. Over 100 children took part, giving up their break and lunchtimes to rehearse, make props, choreograph scenes and practice songs.





Mission Survive and Thrive

In June, Year 4 pupils at Princefield spent two days exploring opportunities to work towards several skill sets including:

- Communication
- Determination
- Listening to instructions
- Teamwork
- Problem Solving

The children took part in activities involving various problem-solving tasks, life skills and some outdoor education skills.





Our Year 4 boys team won the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent County Key Stage 2 Cross Country finals at Keele University on Friday 2 June.



Marshbrook is delighted to have been re-awarded the School Games Mark Gold Award for another year. The purpose of the School Games Mark is to reward and recognise school's engagement (*both provision and uptake*) in the School Games against a national benchmark and to celebrate keeping young people active.

Despite the restrictions of the pandemic our commitment to promoting active lifestyles and sporting participation has not wavered and we were thrilled to achieve the gold standard once again.

The criteria for achieving gold is particularly challenging and we were required to show robust evidence that the whole school is fully engaged in:

- Maintaining and growing your school's engagement in the School Games and your delivery of 60 active minutes for every child
- Creating positive experiences to ensure physical activity and competition provision is designed to reflect the motivation, competence and confidence of your young people and has a clear intent
- A clear focus on particular transition points and how secondary schools are engaging in the School Games
- Creating positive experiences that support the character development of young people
- Advocated to key stakeholders how the School Games makes a meaningful difference to the lives of children and young people, including engaging and educating their parents



Developing our Christian Vision and Values

As a Church of England school, it is essential that our Christian Vision and Values are seen throughout everything that we do in school.

We are inspected under the SIAMS framework to explore the question "How effective is the school's distinctive Christian vision, established and promoted by leadership at all levels, in enabling pupils and adults to flourish?"



Our **Vision**, represented visually in our school badge, is a constant reminder of what we wish to achieve.

Hand in Hand we work together to provide a happy, nurturing and safe environment where every child is inspired to love learning, flourish and reach their God given potential.

To achieve our **Vision**, our school motto is *Aim High Believe, Fly High Achieve.*

We embed this everyday through our praise system - recognising the pupils who have shown great self belief and then acted on this to achieve great things. We use shared language around the theme of flying to support our students as they move through our school and as they transition to Middle School. Our classes are named after birds to further remind children of the importance of working to achieve the **Vision**.

The **Values** that we live by show how we expect our children and staff to achieve our **Vision**.

They are: *Thankfulness | Friendship | Respect | Courage | Hope | Peace*

Alongside our broad and ambitious academic curriculum, we offer a holistic approach to personal development. By using the shared language of our **Vision** and **Values**, children understand the importance of their personal development journey.

There is a caring ethos in the school with children nurtured as individuals to achieve their best. The **Vision** is followed by all stakeholders of the school to direct and guide decision making and procedures. The school has a family feel and as a result, attendance and behaviour are good, the school has an excellent reputation in the community, parents speak highly about the staff and children and the school is full. The proactive and effective Governing Committee ensures this vision is maintained and decisions are child focussed. This can be seen in the governors meeting minutes and their involvement in the school.

As a Church of England school we have incredibly strong links with our local parish church, St Mary the Virgin and St Chad, Brewood. We work closely with the clergy, who are represented on our Local Governing Committee and the children regularly worship in communion with them, both in school and in church.



Click here to
watch our video



Fantastic new play equipment thanks to generous donation

St John's First School are absolutely delighted to show off their fantastic new play equipment that has been made possible because of an incredibly generous donation of £7,000 made by Lord Newport on behalf of Bradford Estates.

Emma Challiner, Headteacher, said, "We were looking into getting new equipment, some heavy-duty structures, and enquired about funding from various sources but everyone came back saying sorry, there was no funding available. One of our parents suggested writing to Lord Newport asking if there was any chance of helping us."

"He very kindly said yes and gave us a cheque for £7,000, which has allowed us to get some amazing things for the children - and they are thoroughly enjoying it!"

"We have a playhouse which the children sometimes use as a garage and pretend to fill their bikes up with petrol, and sometimes they use it as a cafe and ride around it pretending it's a drive through. We have a huge wooden frame structure which involves putting pipes together for water or a ball to run through it - which is marvellous for problem solving."

"There are sand and water features and another piece of equipment which has a number of posts with holes in where the children thread string through it, make dens and climb through. It's up to them what they do with it and how they use it."

"It's absolutely fantastic for the school and we were delighted to welcome Lord Newport and his fiancée to have a look at what we have. The children were so thrilled to see them and they were so lovely with the children. The outdoor learning area means so much to the school and we are so touched by his generosity."

Lord Newport, who is managing director of Bradford Estates, said, "Outdoor learning is so important, particularly as children have missed out on so many opportunities and school activities such as trips and residential due to the pandemic."

"Bradford Estates is committed to supporting the local community and one of the cornerstones of a community is its school. We were delighted to be able to help St John's First School in bringing a vision to life. We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to the school to see first-hand this impressive new outdoor learning area."

To see the play equipment for yourself, alongside more of what to expect from our fabulous Early Years department, please click the video link on the left or watch it on our website -

<https://stjohnsbishopswood.org/>



Viscount Alexander Newport with his fiancée Eliza Liepina with the pupils at St John's First School in Bishop's Wood in their new outdoor learning area

The Penk Valley Journey

a parent and student perspective

by Jasmine Debney, Work Experience Guest Editor

What exactly is it that makes a 'Penk Valley School' a 'Penk Valley School'? It's clear that the schools under our Trust aim to create a smooth and familiar experience for students transitioning through the key stages, and so, naturally, it's important to investigate if students and parents feel as though what we do is effective. I interviewed parents at Marshbrook First School's sports day, as well as four Year 9 students from Wolgarston High School who had attended Penk Valley middle and first schools, with the aim of gathering their opinions.

Opinions seemed to generally be shared between both parents and students in regards to the overall school system. It was communicated to us by both the parents and the students that the presence of our middle school helped children to transition smoothly from one chapter of school to another. One student remarked that they 'had time to relax after finishing with SATs' before they were thrown into GCSEs, as they spent both Year 7 and Year 8 studying at Penkridge Middle School, before eventually moving

to Wolgarston, and also praised our school system for taking an organised approach to teaching, describing each school as having a 'specific purpose' of preparing their students for the next step. A parent also spoke fondly of the concept of our middle school system, as they felt as though it 'allowed their children to stay younger for longer'. From these reports, I understand that both parents and children seem to value the fact that they have some time to really enjoy Key Stage 3 before they have to face the pressure of GCSEs, specifically picking their options.

Naturally, this was the next aspect of school life that we asked the students about, hoping to really understand what it's like to be a new Year 9 student with the task of picking their options. We received mixed opinions - some students seemed to be very prepared to pick their options despite only joining Wolgarston in September 2021, while others said that they struggled to confidently decide on subjects that felt right for them. Upon asking them to tell us more, it became clear that the main factor deciding how confident

a student was in their choices was how set they were on a career for the future - two of the four students that we interviewed mentioned that they didn't really know what they wanted to do in the future, and so they just picked subjects that they enjoy, hoping to find a field that suited them by pursuing their options throughout their time at Wolgarston. The student that felt most confident in their choices had a clear idea of their future career, this is important in helping assess the careers education provision.

The curriculum and way of school life was also praised by both demographics, with parents and students alike commenting on the consistent behaviour expectations and ethos at all Trust schools, and how this helped them to understand what was expected of them as they moved up the schools. Parents also praised the community feel of the Trust system, stating that both themselves and their children felt well acquainted with all members of the school's community - one parent mentioned that they were grateful that their children would always have friends or siblings at their next school due to the system. Students also praised the fluidity of our approach to the curriculum, stating that it helped them to get a feel for what their next step of education would look like. Overall, the pupils that we interviewed regarded our 'Trust' school experience and curriculum as very balanced and well organised.

However, an interesting point brought up by one of the students was that the consistent curriculum and enrichment present throughout their whole school experience was occasionally causing them to become 'burnt out' and 'bored' of some subjects. The students told us that they'd been learning some things ever since Reception, and had therefore lost a lot of interest in the subject as they grew up. One of the students stated that they wanted to take Mandarin or German instead of French as it was 'something new'. Students also suggested other subjects that they would be interested in seeing as a GCSE option, such as Drama, and Design and Technology.

To conclude our interview with the students, we asked them if, given the chance to go through their school experience again, they would rather leave middle school at Year 6 and attend a high school in Year 7, or if they would prefer to join high school in Year 9 as they did previously. All students said that they would much prefer to stay the same, and join high school after finishing Year 8 at a middle school, mostly so that they weren't thrown under pressure to focus on their GCSEs before they felt as though they needed to. Of course, this is only four students' opinions, but, from this, it seems as though pupils really value the bridging between Year 6 and Year 9 that middle school provide and that the continuity between our schools is a real strength.



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