

The Athelstan Trust

Report to Parents May 2023

Caring, Collaborative and Excellent

It has already been an eventful year for the Athelstan Trust. We are delighted to welcome Leighterton Primary in Gloucestershire who joined the Trust on 1 May. This is an important development as we now have primary and secondary schools and children from EYFS to Year 13 within the Trust. Avening Primary, also in Gloucestershire will join us later this year.

We have also had two very successful Ofsted inspections. Chipping Sodbury School improved to a “Good in all areas” judgement and Bradon Forest School retained the previous “Good in all areas” judgement. All the schools within the Trust are now either Good or Outstanding. You can read more details about the inspectors’ findings later in this newsletter.

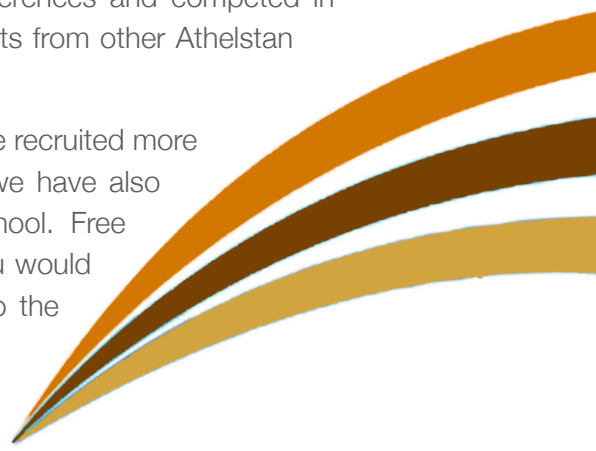
We have also recruited an excellent new Headteacher, Will Ruscoe, who starts at Sir William Romney’s School in September but is already spending time at the school each week. We have also recruited strong staff at all our schools to take up positions from September 2023.

It has been very satisfying to see all the drama and music performances return to normal post COVID-19 and our students have ventured off on Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, trips to support what they are learning in the classroom as well as going as far afield as Berlin and New York and taking part in language exchanges.

Our staff have enjoyed the chance to visit each others’ schools for training on subjects such as supporting SEND and vulnerable students, effective use of assessment strategies and to share best practice on safeguarding and supporting children who are finding it difficult to attend. Early career teachers have had an opportunity to share experiences with colleagues who are also starting their teaching careers at other Athelstan schools and department leaders have met regularly to discuss their subjects with leaders in other schools.

Students have taken part in English Literature and Language Conferences and competed in Maths Challenges and a Speech and Debate Festival against students from other Athelstan schools.

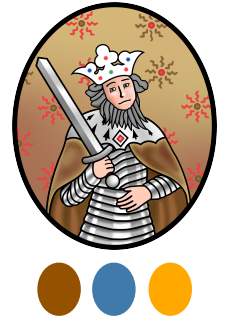
We are aware that the impact of COVID-19 is still evident and we have recruited more pastoral staff in all our schools as well as deputy SENDCOs and we have also introduced a new role of Senior Mental Health Lead in each school. Free counselling is available to all our staff and secondary students. If you would like to discuss how your child can access counselling, do speak to the school’s pastoral office.



@AthelstanTrust
@BradonForestSch
@CSSSch
@TheDeanAcademy
@MalmesburySch
@swr_school



MULTI-ACADEMY TRUSTS AND WHAT MAKES THE ATHELSTAN TRUST SPECIAL



Our Multi-Academy Trust is an organisation in which children, staff and parents should feel part of a **caring, collaborative and excellent** community.

We respect and value the individual nature and ethos of our schools while believing we are more effective when we work together and support each other to drive sustained improvements.

- We believe that successful schools are rooted in their local community.
- We aim to celebrate spiritual and creative diversity, success, and lifelong learning.
- We are inclusive and collaborative and promote a culture of openness and integrity.

The government continues to be very clear that they want to see all schools joining an Academy Trust.

Since the creation of the Athelstan Trust in March 2015 we have had a clear strategic aim to grow the Trust in a cautious and considered way within our geographical area of Wiltshire, Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire. The Trust has grown from 1-6 schools with student numbers increasing from 1200 to over 4000 students. The most recent school to join us (in May 2023) is Leighterton Primary School.

WHERE WE ARE NOW

We believe that we meet the criteria of a 'Strong Trust'

- **High Quality and Inclusive Education** - We deliver a high-quality education across our schools, including for disadvantaged children and children with SEND.
- **School Improvement** - There is clear evidence that we work quickly to improve standards within all our schools, transforming previously under performing schools, and maintaining appropriately performing schools.
- **Strategic Governance** - The Trust operates an effective and robust governance structure that involves schools and exemplifies ethical standards as evidenced by the recent external review of governance. The Trust engages effectively with parents and the wider community. We have strong Local Governing Bodies and a clear scheme of delegation.
- **Financial Management** - The Trust is underpinned by strong and effective financial management, prioritising the use of resources, including the estate, to deliver the best educational experience for children. We maintain sufficient Trust reserves and have invested in increased staffing in all our schools. We have invested significantly in IT infrastructure and in capital projects.
- **Workforce** - The Trust is the Southwest Flexible Working Ambassador and works with schools and Trusts across the region to support recruiting and retaining staff. The Trust trains, recruits, develops, deploys and retains great teachers and leaders throughout their careers.

ATHELSTAN SCHOOLS RATED GOOD IN ALL AREAS BY OFSTED

Earlier this academic year, in November, Chipping Sodbury School was inspected by Ofsted and judged as Good in All Areas. We are very proud of this result which is further endorsement of our strong track record of school improvement across all our schools. Since joining The Athelstan Trust, The Dean Academy has gone from Special Measures to Good in all areas, Bradon Forest School went from Requires Improvement to Good (and this judgement was recently retained) and Chipping Sodbury School has moved from 3x Requires Improvement Judgements to Good. The Trust now consists of one Outstanding and five Good Schools.



Katherine Turner, Headteacher at Chipping Sodbury School

Here is a summary of the report's findings:

"Chipping Sodbury is a nurturing and inclusive school. There are strong relationships between staff and pupils. Pupils enjoy school and feel safe. Parents agree that staff will go the 'extra mile' for pupils."

"Leaders have high expectations for every child. The school's core values, such as responsibility and aspiration, run through all aspects of school life."

"Pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education or employment."

"Pupils say that bullying is rare. If incidents do occur, they have confidence in staff to resolve them."

"The arrangements for safeguarding are effective."

"The trust has provided a range of effective training opportunities for governors and the wider staff body. The impact of these can be seen in policies and practices across the school."



"Those responsible for governance take their responsibility for staff workload seriously. Most staff agree that leaders take positive steps to reduce their workload. They say that their well-being is considered when changes or new initiatives are introduced."

Ofsted praised the effectiveness of Governors and Chair of Governors, Robert Owen said *"I was absolutely delighted with the outcome. Over the last few years the school has been through a significant school improvement journey including joining the Athelstan Trust. This has involved a huge effort from governors, school leaders and staff with great support from the Trust and other external partners. The Ofsted Good rating is a huge endorsement for all this hard work and the school is now in a strong position to further develop and improve."*

Chipping Sodbury School's Headteacher, Katherine Turner said *"I am delighted that Ofsted have recognised the many strengths of Chipping Sodbury School. Having worked at Chipping Sodbury for a number of years, it is a school of which I am enormously proud and to have this important external validation of our many strengths is immensely gratifying."*

Bradon Forest School has retained their "Good" judgement following a recent Ofsted inspection in March - congratulations to all our colleagues at the school. Inspectors praised the well-planned, ambitious curriculum, the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities, the calm atmosphere around the school and they noted that provision for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has improved.

Here are some of the things the Ofsted report says about Bradon Forest School:

"Since the last inspection, leaders have strengthened the school curriculum. It is now more ambitious. This has led to pupils learning and achieving well in most subjects."

"Pupils are taught to be tolerant of others. Leaders have prioritised this."

"Pupils are safe at Bradon Forest. Teachers care about pupils. There is a calm atmosphere around the school and most pupils behave well in class. Parents agree with this."

"The school has a strong careers programme."

"Leaders work in the best interests of the pupils. They work with families to support pupils with complex needs. Staff at the school enjoy working there and the headteacher has created a sense of common purpose. The school is well supported by the trust."

CEO, Tim Gilson said *"It is a real testament to the effective leadership and hard work of Sarah Haines and the team."* He also thanked the central team School Improvement Leads for their support to colleagues at Bradon Forest School. LGB Chair, John Scott said *"On behalf of the Governing Body we are delighted with the result of the Ofsted inspection. I echo Tim Gilson's comment in that it is just reward for all the hard work undertaken by Sarah Haines and the team."*



Sarah Haines, Headteacher at Bradon Forest School



THE ATLAS COURSE

The Athelstan Trust Leading Autism Support Course is an invaluable resource for parents and carers of young people who are autistic.

Every new stage of parenting brings its own set of unique challenges. As you reach each new 'milestone', society expects that you will navigate through this seamlessly. And nobody gives you a set of instructions. As soon as you get past the sleepless nights - the tantrums kick in. Primary School starts - then the friendship group issues take over your life. Things calm down for a moment or two and then ... teenagers.

Parenting teenagers requires approximately ten thousand new skills. Whilst tending to spots, reassuring over body image and monitoring their homework - you are expected to learn the latest Tik Tok dance, immediately stop being embarrassing and protect them from all the potential harms on their phones.

Teenagers are working with brains which are still under construction. At times, their behaviour may seem quite mature, but at other times teens behave or think in illogical, impulsive or emotional ways.

It's exhausting.

Now imagine that your teen is neurodivergent.

Many parents/carers of autistic children will have had to fight to get the correct diagnosis for their child. They will have endured lengthy waiting lists; they may have had to pay privately. The system is fraught with frustrations. In the meantime, family members, friends and strangers will have passed judgement on their skills as parents. There will have been endless hurdles in navigating the world of school and education. It is estimated that in the UK, one in one hundred people are diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Condition, and yet, this diagnosis remains as misunderstood as ever. Sadly, we still do not live in a society that is accommodating or even accepting of those who are not "neurotypical."

Where can these parents turn for help and support?



Atlas is a course designed for parents/carers whose child has fallen into or is suspected to be on the autistic spectrum. It is an opportunity to explore strategies for navigating both family life and school life. Parents of autistic children may find that 'normal' parenting strategies simply do not work. Over the course of four weeks, the programme aims to explore sensible and manageable strategies to employ at home, school and when navigating day to day life.

Each week, a new topic is explored:

Week 1: Sensory Issues

Week 2: Communication

Week 3: Behaviour

Week 4: Parents' Choice - anything goes!

The Atlas Course has been developed by Debbie Riall, a Specialist Teacher for Autism working across all the schools in The Athelstan Trust. The most recent course was held at Bradon Forest. Members of the Bradon Forest SEND team shadowed the course with the vision of them leading future courses themselves. Being enthused by the positive impact, they are already considering a second course aimed at supporting parents of Bradon Forest students diagnosed with or suspected to have ADHD.

Debbie has spent her career pursuing an understanding of the impact of school life on autistic pupils. Her knowledge and understanding of the subject is incredible. She speaks with energy, enthusiasm and warmth - all the while interjecting anecdotes from her working and personal life which makes her extremely relatable. In the safe space which Debbie created on the course, parents were able to open up about their day-to-day struggles and difficulties. At times this was exceptionally emotional. Not just sadness, anger, or frustration. Plenty of wry laughter was heard, as well as sheer joy as parents shared the wonderful strengths, interests and quirks held by their amazing children. There is a palpable need to provide families with practical assistance. Providing this additional help for parents empowers them to support their young people.

Over the four weeks, Debbie shared a plethora of innovative ways to support the needs of autistic children. Furthermore, parents were able to share their own ideas and realistic strategies. We hope that parents left feeling that the experience was worthwhile, and they are better equipped to deal with their own set of unique challenges.

PARENT VIEW

"Attending The Atlas Course has been a lifeline for us to understand our son better. He has only just been diagnosed with Asperger's (he is 13 years old), although we suspected it since he was around two years old. Debbie has been a font of all things on the spectrum and sharing stories and ideas with fellow parents has been so helpful. This will help us as parents help our son and give him the life he deserves. PS. Our children are AMAZING!"

"Thank you to Debbie for the help, support and advice given during the 'Atlas' programme. The coping strategies and ideas given have been so helpful and insightful. Widening my knowledge around Autism has been a great tool for our whole family."

VIBRANT NEW LOOK CANTEENS AND INNOVATIVE, SEASONALLY INFLUENCED MENUS AT THREE ATHELSTAN SCHOOLS

A new catering company started at the beginning of January at Bradon Forest and Chipping Sodbury Schools and at Sir William Romney's School from April 2023. The biggest hit has been free breakfast porridge for the whole school community. ABM Catering believe that everyone should start the day with a hearty breakfast and during the current cost of living crisis, this is appreciated by both students and staff.



Parents have commented:

"Great idea, I always worried about those students who didn't qualify for FSM, they were just expected to get on with it, and staff who worked so hard that they often didn't get a chance to eat before they started work contributing to feeling rubbish. A brilliant move for all!"

"Wow that looks amazing!"

"My lad has sung its praises all week, said prices were similar. Well done!"

Students have commented; "it's so much better" and "the porridge tastes great!"

There was a thorough process to choose the new caterers overseen by an external consultant. A panel including Nicola Tilley (CFO), Richard Blacker (Head of Operations), Sarah Haines (Headteacher at Bradon Forest School) and Katherine Turner (Headteacher at Chipping Sodbury School) heard each company's pitch for the business and sampled food.

They decided ABM had the winning formula of investment plans for our kitchens and a range of freshly prepared, innovative, seasonally influenced menus. They also liked the ethical/environmental focus e.g., hydration stations rather than bottled water (they don't include drinks in the meal deal price as water is free, so you get more food for your money), bamboo cutlery and a drive to prevent wastage. They were also impressed with the branding and the street food range.



ATTRACTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ARE CRUCIAL FOR OUR STUDENTS AND COLLEAGUES

One of the advantages of Athelstan Trust's growth is that our funding for capital projects such as major site improvements is now allocated annually without the need for us to make bids. This allows us to plan projects and allocate funds according to the highest urgency. We are also fortunate to have a team of skilled site staff based at each school who sometimes work together on specific projects.

This year we have made the following site investment:

The upgrade of Bradon Forest School's reception and offices has improved the approach to the school and site security. There has also been replacement of air conditioning and a boiler.



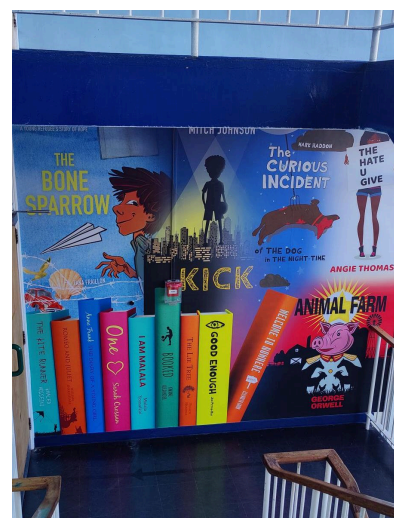
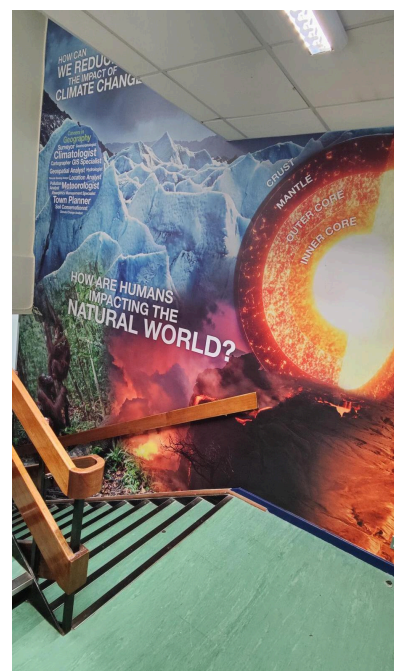
Sir William Romney's School's drama hall and gym roofs have been repaired. New fencing has improved security and prevented dog walkers accessing the site.

Windows and boilers at Chipping Sodbury School have been replaced and there has been an investment in IT.



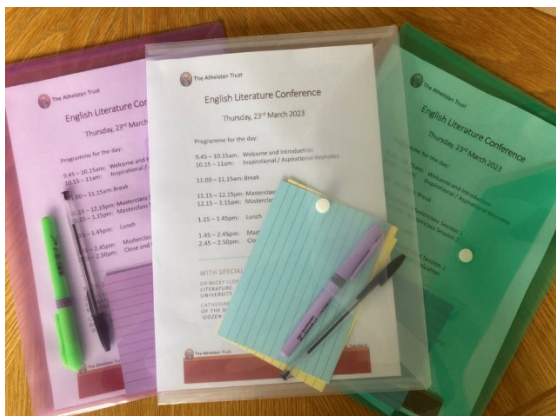
There is a new canopy at The Dean Academy. The car park has been resurfaced and food tech rooms have been refurbished.

We have extremely strong teams of site staff at all our schools who turn their hands to anything and make a huge difference to our ability to provide an attractive, safe learning and teaching environment for our students and colleagues. They are supported by Richard Blacker, Head of Operations.



ENGLISH CONFERENCES: ASPIRING TO A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE AND LANGUAGE

Two conferences have been held this year for Year 11 students who have shown a talent for English. The aim was to tell them more about studying English Language and/or Literature at A Level and to give an insight into the exciting careers communication and writing skills might lead to. There were also valuable tips on how to do well at GCSE and Athelstan sixth form students discussed how different the A Level course is from GCSE and what sixth form life is like.



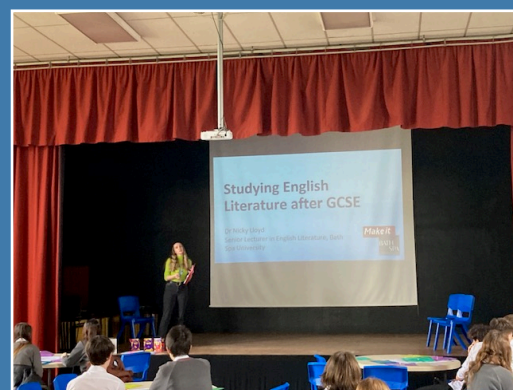
The English Language Conference was hosted at Malmesbury School and there were 3 inspiring key-note speakers whose study of English and love of words has enabled them to work in jobs they love: Mark Cummings, (BBC Radio Breakfast Show Presenter and magazine feature writer), Jo De Vries (journalism lecturer who works in publishing commissioning writing) and Alex Evelyn (writer-in residence at Malmesbury School and published author). Their tips included finding your own style; focusing on your audience and choosing exactly the right word to convey what you mean. Alex also reflected back on being in Year 11 and how English classes gave her a chance

to be free to express who she really was and what she was feeling. She remembered the thrill of being told by her teacher that she was destined for a career with a pen. She also congratulated all the students in the room for being believed in by their teachers and nominated as someone with real potential to study English.

The day also featured fiction and non-fiction workshops linked to GCSE questions.

The English Literature Conference was held at Sir William Romney's School. The day started with two keynote presentations from special guests, Dr Nicky Lloyd, Senior Lecturer at Bath Spa University and published poet and poetry prize winner, Catherine Swire. Nicky gave students an exciting glimpse into what an English Literature degree could look like before leading a masterclass on Romanticism and poetry. Catherine's keynote explored with students the powerful message that 'Literature is us, all our stories remade by the stories of others: the prison of immobility: the healing of secret connection: and the justice of transformation'. Catherine also generously gave her time and expertise in delivering a masterclass on approaching unseen poetry.

(Continued on page 7)



Alongside these external masterclasses, a group of Athelstan English teachers also shared their expertise and passion for Literature, enabling students to choose from a menu of interesting, relevant masterclasses that both linked to their GCSE study but also prompted them to think more ambitiously about the text.

Student feedback was overwhelmingly positive “really helpful”, “fun to learn in a new way outside the class” “nice to be with people from other schools”. Students said they feel more confident about writing in the exam and also that they have thought more about English and its value to their further education and future careers. Most students have also indicated that they think they will improve their grade in the writing section of the GCSE as a direct result of the conferences.

PROGRESSIVE MASCULINITY

Why do boys underachieve in relation to girls? Why is boys' behaviour generally worse and more disruptive? Why are boys less engaged? Why do they make less progress? Why are they less academically aspirational?

Mike Nicolson is committed to finding the answers by understanding what it means to be ‘a man’ at a time when our boys and young men are feeling more isolated and confused than ever. He runs a company called [Progressive Masculinity](http://www.progressivemascularity.co.uk) and he has been supporting all Athelstan schools to equip our students with the social, emotional and academic skills they need to fulfil their enormous potential.

Mike has run workshops with students, staff and parents. He also facilitated a training session at the last Trust Day for non teaching staff working in our pastoral support teams.

He talks about key principles of taking boys seriously as relational learners.



As a former English teacher and middle leader Mike has the perfect skills to build rapport with students, drawing out their views and helping them reconstruct attitudes towards masculinity (many admit to sabotaging their academic success because of a desire to appear masculine). He offers a safe space for students to talk about their views and attitudes to influential figures such as Andrew Tate as he feels it is better for opinions to be “out there” so they can be guided. Some boys tell him they don't know how to talk about their problems and frustrations so he helps develop emotional literacy. He asks them what kind of father/husband they want to be and links behaviour in school as steps towards who they want to become. One of the things that works particularly well is giving students resources so they can plan their own PHSE lessons to share what they have learnt with peers.

A parent at a recent workshop at Sir William Romney's School commented *"The session was incredibly thought provoking and a great deal of empathy was shown towards boys he'd interacted with. It was so refreshing to see one of the takeaways being the quote "masculinity isn't toxic, the absence of it is."*



After a session with Bradon Forest School, Mike told Headteacher, Sarah Haines, *"I thought you would like to know that from an outsider's point of view Bradon Forest is a school which has a lovely feel and energy to it. Lots of staff went out of their way to come and speak to me, the boys in the workshops were fantastic and even on the corridors I had pupils who didn't know who I was saying hello or starting a conversation with me. You and your staff have clearly created a great culture."*

MESSAGE FROM TIM GILSON, CEO

I hope that you are enjoying the sunshine and that if you have children going through SATs, GCSEs or A Levels it hasn't been too challenging and stressful. It is tough for parents supporting children through these big life events. As I write it has been great to hear how well the SATs and GCSEs have gone in school with very high attendance and very calm, sensible behaviour during exams/tests. Staff in all our schools work hard to make the process as smooth as possible and to support all our students' needs.



We start looking forward to welcoming our next cohorts of new students for taster days and transition events after half term which is always lovely. Several of our schools have record numbers of new students joining.

Please do get in touch if you are interested in becoming a governor or trustee or contact the Headteacher if you would like to visit any of our schools.

Tim Gilson

CEO, Athelstan Trust

LOCAL GOVERNOR AND BOARD TRUSTEE VACANCIES

The Athelstan Trust strongly believes in local governance and we are fortunate to have governors who are committed to supporting the schools within their communities. Trustees take on a strategic role making decisions in the best interest of all the students and schools within the Trust. Governors and Trustees need to be available to attend meetings 6 times per year with the occasional need for availability during the day for interview or disciplinary panels. We are always interested in hearing from anyone with skills and availability to contribute at any level of governance and we would be pleased to hear from you via admin@theathelstantrust.org or you can contact your school's office.