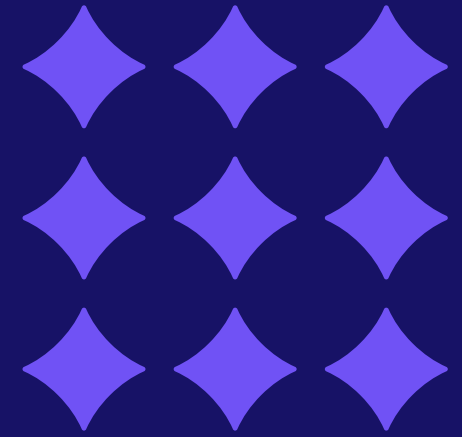


**STOUR VALE
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STAFF NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2024



INTRODUCTION

I am excited to welcome you to the first edition of Stour Vale's biannual staff newsletter. The newsletter will focus on staff, celebrating the expertise and professionalism of colleagues in the wide range of roles which surround and facilitate the provision of excellent education and care across Stour Vale. It will also promote the benefits of being part of our family of unique and diverse schools and settings. Stour Vale continues to grow. During the summer term we welcomed two new member schools and one day nursery: Holywell Primary School in Rubery and Moat Farm Infant School and Lavender Farm Day Nursery in Oldbury. In this edition you will hear from Moat Farm Infant School and Huntingtree Primary School, the most recent school to join us.

Thank you for all that you do every day for the children and young people in your schools and settings, to support each other and to welcome staff in schools who are joining or may be interested in joining Stour Vale.

Rachel Salter, CEO



FROM PUPIL TO TEACHER

As a previous student of Oldbury Academy, I am proud to now be on the other side – at the front of the classroom. Since leaving Oldbury in 2017, I completed my A-levels at King Edward IV Sixth Form; continued my love of science through an undergraduate course at UoB; and completed an internship focusing on nanotechnology at the University of Cambridge. Following on from this, I began my PGCE with Stour Vale, where I had the opportunity to spend time in most of the secondary schools within the Trust. It feels incredibly surreal working alongside some of the staff that educated me, and also seeing pictures around Oldbury from my time there. Above all, I love being able to connect with the students (many of whom have similar backgrounds to me) and help them to develop higher aspirations for themselves.

Olivia Campbell, Teacher of Science – Oldbury Academy



STOUR VALE TEACHER TRAINING HUB OPENS SEPTEMBER 2024

Stour Vale's Regional Teacher Training Hub continues to grow and thrive, supporting the development of postgraduate trainee teachers from across the Black Country and surrounding areas. Having developed from the School Direct provision of the former Redhill and Earls Teaching Schools, we have run PGCE courses for both Primary and Secondary trainees for several years now. This term, 58 trainees have started with us at the Hub.

We currently deliver 11 days of local training for Secondary Worcester and Newman PGCE trainees, and the entire University of Worcester PGCE course for Primary trainees from our Hub base at Ridgewood. We also work with a wide partnership of around 70 schools across the region for placements and regularly visit schools to support trainees and their mentors.

Many of our staff may not be aware that we have a dedicated ITT Hub within the Trust, so we want to spread the word and encourage everyone to share this fantastic opportunity for local training with potential trainees. If you know of anyone who is considering training to teach, they are very welcome to get in touch via teach@svat.org.uk for more information.

Lastly, we would like to take this opportunity to extend a huge thank you to all Stour Vale staff members who have supported our trainees in school and colleagues who have contributed to our taught PGCE sessions. Some Stour Vale member schools have also recently supported with our first Intensive Training and Practice (ITaP) week on Behaviour and Routines, which is a new DfE requirement for ITT courses. Feedback from trainees, university colleagues and school staff has been really positive.

Tom Holder, Stour Vale Teacher Training Hub Lead



WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBER SCHOOLS

We asked the headteachers of Moat Farm Infant School and Huntingtree Primary School to share their experience of joining Stour Vale.

We are a 4-form entry Infant School in Oldbury with our own School Nursery provision and Day Nursery, called Lavender Farm. We have a high proportion of children in our school with Special Educational Needs and in particular complex Special Educational Needs. We also have a high proportion of children and families from an area that is typified by high levels of social need and deprivation. We are a very friendly, nurturing school, passionate about developing the young child.

We have really great links with Moat Farm Junior School, which enabled us to watch as they made the decision to join Stour Vale Academy Trust and their journey as they joined. We decided to join Stour Vale because we felt that the time was right for us to join an academy trust. We did look at other trusts but believed that Stour Vale was the right fit for our school, and that we shared the same values.

Since joining Stour Vale, we have been able to continue joining the different network meetings and we look forward to another inspiring conference this December. We have been able to access support, guidance and friendship from other schools and the Stour Vale Central Team on areas such as finance and HR.

We have also been given the opportunity to give back to Stour Vale and offer our support around SEND and Early Years. As a school we host Stour Vale students and support in their development. We have met with the DfE on a few occasions to share our experience of joining the Trust and to share our school. We have hosted new schools who have been looking to take the same journey as us as well as other schools who wish to see our practice.

It has been a real privilege joining Stour Vale Academy Trust and we are lucky to be part of such a supportive family of schools. We definitely made the right decision and look forward to our future together.

Deborah Walker, Headteacher – Moat Farm Infant School

We are delighted to be joining Stour Vale at what feels like the perfect time in our school journey. We feel that the forging of our partnership now will be mutually beneficial, at a time when we can offer as much to Stour Vale as we know will be offered in return.

The school we inherited in September 2016 had just been judged to 'require improvement' by Ofsted, for the second time in a row. Overcoming the various challenges of eight eventful years and through working together as a school community led us to realise that we were ready to consider becoming part of something bigger.

While we considered our options, Stour Vale stood out from the first meeting. We loved how down-to-earth the CEO and the team was. The trust's vision of 'secure autonomy' was really important to us. Our school is unique and highly valued by our community... and we know Stour Vale will support us to continue to grow in this mould.

We are excited for the future and are thrilled that Stour Vale wanted us as part of their family of schools.

Jim Harrold, Headteacher – Huntingtree Primary School



ATTENDANCE MATTERS

Attendance matters to everyone at Stour Vale! Throughout the last academic year, member schools have worked tirelessly to ensure that all our pupils and young people are in school every day and on time. The Attendance Group meets half termly and a key focus last year was stopping attendance falling in the run-up to Christmas. Stour Vale schools had a range of incentives to encourage full attendance right until the last day – the impact for every school was phenomenal. Thank you everyone for your work to achieve this. It was a whole staff effort in every school.



School	Attendance Dec. 22	Attendance Dec. 23
Moat Farm Juniors	91%	93.8%
Newtown Primary School	88.8%	93.3%
Northfield Road Primary School	88.2%	92.93%
Olive Hill Primary School	89.5%	94.1%
Oldbury Academy	85.8%	89.1%
Redhill School	89.1%	91.1%
Ridgewood Hill School	86.3%	90.8%
The Earls High School	88.7%	91.7%

The collaboration between Stour Vale schools is strong and is the embodiment of 'Creating the difference together'. There is a shared commitment to support each other as we all grapple with considerable and ongoing challenges. The strength of this collaboration is built on the excellent practice we have across our Trust.

Thank you for the difference you make. Attendance really is everyone's business at Stour Vale.

Lara Stone, Executive Leader

NEW HEALTH AND SAFETY SYSTEM

Early this year saw the launch of Parago, the Trust-wide Health, Safety and Compliance system implemented by the central team to support headteachers in their duty to keep all staff and pupils safe. The system has been key in helping school leaders develop robust systems for monitoring compliance, incidents and risk and has also allowed for timely and accurate reporting and monitoring. The success of this project has been down to the hard work by our member schools who have worked collaboratively to get the system up and running.

The Earls High School have been one of the champions of this project and Anna Wade, SBM, commented: "Parago has saved us time and energy in providing system prompts for checks and also a central repository for storing and accessing compliance documentation. We are looking forward to launching helpdesk over the next few weeks to enable us to track and understand trends for our estate management and ICT calls."

Over the next term the Trust's new Estate and Procurement lead, Dean Brittle, will be working to embed and develop the system further in our schools.

Laura Braznell, Trust Business Leader

MASTERING NUMBER

Mastering Number is a large-scale nationwide programme for teachers of pupils in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2, designed to help children embed good number sense. It is offered by the National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics (NCETM) and the Maths Hubs Network. It aims to develop solid number sense, including fluency and flexibility with number facts, which will have a lasting impact on future learning for all children. It also involves high-quality professional development for teachers.

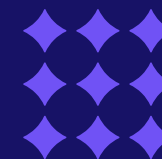
Several schools in Stour Vale are working with the Maths Hub and three Stour Vale primary schools (Northfield Road, Newtown and Queen Victoria) have collaborated closely to develop maths understanding in their settings.

The Mastering Number programme is supported in Stour Vale with the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues in other member schools. It has been helpful to have Stour Vale schools at different points in implementing Mastering Number, as schools new to the programme can see how it looks in class when implementation is more established. The pedagogy behind Mastering Number gives teachers a better understanding of how to break down complex mathematical ideas into manageable steps using manipulatives to support pupils' understanding. The use of physical and visual representations such as tens frames, number lines, counters and Rekenreks has helped pupils visualise abstract concepts.

Annie Nelson from Newtown Primary had this to say about her experience of Mastering Number as a Year 1 teacher: "Mastering Number by NCETM has had a transformative impact on the Year 1 pupils at Newtown, enhancing their oracy and explanation skills through the use of carefully structured sentence stems. This scheme has empowered children to articulate their mathematical thinking with clarity and confidence. After using Mastering Number for the entirety of the year, they are now more assured in their foundational number skills, seamlessly incorporating a variety of hands-on equipment into their learning more independently. Our budding mathematicians are flourishing, showing not only a deeper understanding of numbers and operations but also a newfound enthusiasm for maths."

All schools are noticing that children have become quicker and more confident with numbers because the sessions focus on number facts and relationships. Mastering Number builds deeper conceptual understanding so rather than just memorising procedures, pupils grasp key mathematical procedures like place value, number bonds and patterns. The introduction of the Mastering Number program in the EYFS and KS1 has helped build a strong mathematical foundation, improved teacher confidence and skills, and fostered a love of learning maths in pupils. It has equipped them with the essential numeracy skills that are critical for future success.

Gareth Ludlam, Senior Primary School Improvement Leader



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SENCOS VISIT NASEN LIVE 2024

Despite the support of wonderful school colleagues, the role of SENCO can be a lonely one. Making contact, both within and outside the Trust, is therefore hugely important for our wellbeing and for ideas to improve provision for our children whilst keeping workload manageable.

For the second year running, in July, Stour Vale SENCOs collectively attended the annual NASEN LIVE conference in Birmingham, thanks to funding from the central team. A day out with a nice lunch, was a great opportunity to explore new ideas, listen to experts and reflect with colleagues.

The team came away buzzing with a wealth of ideas and resources that are going to help us respond to greater complexity of need in our schools in a measured and strategic way. As Jenna from Ridgewood said: "There were some very inspiring sessions and a great opportunity to network not only with our trust colleagues, but other professionals too."

Paul Ramage – Trust Safeguarding and Inclusion Leader

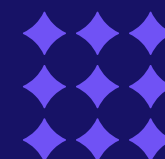


HEAD OF SCIENCE SPEAKS AT NATIONAL SCIENCE CONFERENCE

I am pleased to share an update on our continued involvement in national education initiatives. Last March, I presented at the National Science Conference with PIXL, where I discussed key trends and areas for improvement from the 2023 GCSE Science exams. This was a valuable opportunity to contribute to the wider conversation on enhancing student outcomes in GCSE Science across the country.

I am excited to announce that I will be presenting again this year, focusing on trends from the 2024 exams. This ongoing analysis helps us at Stour Vale to stay ahead of the curve, ensuring that we can provide the best support for our students' success. If you would like to discuss the trends further with me, please do send me an email: matthew.baker@oldburyacademy.org.uk

Matt Baker, Head of Science - Oldbury Academy



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LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN STOUR VALE

Stour Vale is committed to being a strong trust and we recognise the vital role of strategic governance. Local governors are provided with opportunities to receive high-quality information and training necessary for their role. This includes bespoke governor training sessions and other networking opportunities arranged throughout the year. A long-standing governor and a governor new to the role have shared their experience of governance within Stour Vale below.

I have had the satisfying privilege of serving on the local governing body at The Earls for 9 years, the last 2 years as chair. I can honestly say that it is an immensely rewarding albeit demanding and stretching role. I have been able to make a meaningful contribution to the ethos, direction and decision making at the school and to support and encourage the SLT, in particular the headteacher. Being a school governor gives you insights and experiences that you never get as a parent or staff member in a school. You realise the challenges and complexities involved in running a school at a time of rapidly evolving societal change and the incessant demands of changing government priorities in education. My own two children had a superb educational journey at The Earls, and I enjoy being able to give something back to the school that invested so much in them.

Andrew Harwood – Chair of Governors, The Earls High School

I became a governor in Stour Vale in October 2023. My reasons for wanting to join were that I work within further education and wanted to further my knowledge around my role and to broaden my leadership and strategic skills. I have found the role both enlightening and beneficial. Moat Farm Junior School is welcoming and highly professional, and I have been able to gain lots of valuable knowledge and experiences within my first year. I look forward to now driving forward.

Kylie Penn – Local governor, Moat Farm Junior School

If you or anyone you know would like to learn more about becoming a local governor in one of the member schools, please email kglass@svat.org.uk



BHN EXTRAS

BHN Extras is available to all staff in Stour Vale. Benefits include a cycle to work scheme, cashback on prepaid cards with retailers and supermarkets, and savings on gift cards from major retailers and restaurants. Register [here](#).

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CURRICULUM COLLABORATION

Last year we welcomed colleagues from Ridgewood High School to The Earls, to participate in a review of our geography curriculum. Jenny Hill, curriculum leader, and Helen Baldry, AHT, had the opportunity to visit lessons, discuss our curriculum and assessments, speak with students and look at work they had produced. Probably the most valuable parts of the day were the discussions between staff, where everyone involved was able to share their observations, ideas and expertise. Not only did this provide us with a fresh perspective and allow us all to magpie some new ideas, it was also a valuable professional development opportunity for the subject leaders from both schools. Making space for these rich curriculum discussions, which can sometimes be tricky during a busy school term, was a positive experience for everyone, challenging our thinking, allowing us to share best practice and to build new links, particularly between subject leaders.

Nic Hirsch, Headteacher - The Earls High School

AND FINALLY... OFSTED SUCCESS!

Newtown Primary School

Newtown Primary School has been on an incredible improvement journey since Simone Chesney-Ly became headteacher in the summer of 2020. Having previously been judged to be inadequate, their most recent Ofsted inspection in the final week of the summer term confirmed that Newtown is now a good school. Congratulations to the whole staff team for this remarkable achievement! Here, Simone shares her thoughts on how collaboration with secondary colleagues accelerated their improvement journey: "One aspect of being part of Stour Vale Academy Trust that has really supported school improvement is networking with the secondary schools, which is something that Newtown had never done historically. Sharing good practice on safeguarding procedures and improving attendance have been ongoing positive collaboration and leadership development opportunities. We have also really benefited from secondary practitioners' input and feedback on learning reviews in school.

Our French leader and SLT worked closely with the MFL leader from The Earls. There is no way that we would have been able to develop our French curriculum so well without the support of an expert.

We have also had great success with our Art curriculum following collaborative work with The Earls. This was recognised as a strength by Ofsted in our recent inspection. During the HMI's feedback, she recommended replicating our work with the Trust secondary schools for other subjects in the same way that we had for Art and French. The specific example she recommended was to network with a history specialist and prepare children in Key Stage 2 to be able to write like a historian as they do in Year 7+."

Redhill School

Congratulations to the whole staff team at Redhill School on the outcome of their recent Ofsted inspection! This long-awaited inspection, which took place on the hottest days of last academic year, found Redhill to be good across all areas. The report reflects Redhill's considerable strengths, stating that: "Teachers are experts in the subjects they teach." Jamie Clayton, headteacher, said: "We were delighted that the inspection team picked up on our ethos and culture of 'developing all children to be the best that they can be'. Equally pleasing, was the recognition of our high aspirations and ambition for the students in terms of the Quality of Education they receive. The staff, children and parents can be very proud of Redhill School."



Please speak to your headteacher if there is a news item that you think should be shared with staff across Stour Vale. The next edition of the Staff Newsletter will come out in spring.

