

**“A family of academies that promotes lifelong learning and inspires everyone to succeed”**



New Foundation Stage unit, Black Firs.

## Happy Birthday to Us!

It seems like only yesterday that CHS took the first steps towards becoming an academy, a move that would lead to the creation of the Congleton Multi-Academy Trust (Cmat). Two years on, we are now a thriving family of academies, working together to provide a unified approach that enables each member academy to reap the many benefits of being part of a strong team, yet retain the individuality that has led to their success and popularity as educators.

All rated as ‘Good’ schools by Ofsted, our members have gone from strength to strength. Both CHS and Black Firs’ 2016 intakes are now full, with only a few places available in higher years. Castle does still have some capacity, as does our Post 16 provision, due to The Congleton College launch, which generated vital, local vocational training opportunities.

Sharing best practice, expertise and resources continues to be key to the Trust’s success. A prime example of this are the ‘master classes’ in maths and language teaching CHS runs two mornings per week for Castle Primary, enabling member schools to learn from each other, maintain high standards and effectively reduce training costs.

Black Firs’ eagerly awaited dedicated Foundation Stage unit is now completed and teachers, students and parents alike are seeing the benefits of the new state-of-the-art facility.

Over the last two years, the strong team of forty six Local Governors have worked hard to support and challenge the leaders of Cmat to strive for even higher standards. We are holding our joint Governors’ meeting for all Local Governors within Cmat on Tuesday 17th May at Black

Firs at 5:30pm. Governors will tour the new Foundation Stage Unit and begin to map out the next steps in our development.

Cmat remains at the forefront of education, leading the way for Congleton and Cheshire East. In response to the pressing need for a new primary school in Congleton to accommodate the many new housing developments, the Trust has applied for the opportunity to become an Academy Sponsor. Our application is with the Regional Schools’ Commissioner and we await the outcome but a small additional grant to support future development of the Trust has already been confirmed.

We have had two very successful years of growth and development but this is still only the beginning for Cmat. There are great things on the horizon, with many exciting developments in the pipeline and we look forward to celebrating many more birthdays, stronger and larger with each additional year.

**David Hermitt**  
Cmat Chief Executive Officer.



Inside Black Fir’s new Foundation Stage unit.

# Who's Who in Cmat?

Each Cmat academy has its own successful team overseeing the day-to-day running. Staff, governors, parents/carers and students all playing their part and working together.

When it comes to Cmat itself, there are two very important groups responsible for the steering and smooth running of this thriving education 'machine' - The Leadership Team and The Central Services Team.



Leadership Team L-R:  
David Hermit, Linda Morley, Martin Casserley, Jim Barlow,  
Jill Mason & Julia Leonard

## The Leadership Team

The Cmat Leadership Team consists of CEO/ CHS Executive Principal, David Hermit, Heads of CHS, Black Firs and Castle - Jim Barlow, Martin Casserley and Jill Mason, Company Secretary/Director of Finance and Operations, Julia Leonard and Clerk to the Board, Linda Morley. They meet every three weeks to monitor progress and also to discuss issues from all aspects of the trust's activity both as an educator and as a business.

The Team's expertise spans the education journey from the age of three, right up to nineteen and as such, they are able to plan the whole process more effectively to produce a seamless and logical programme of education and transition.

One of the Team's most recent tasks has been managing the development a quality assurance process, enabling each academy within the MAT to prepare their school for its next Ofsted visit. All the academies undertook training from Her Majesty's Inspectors (HMI) to develop self-evaluation and school development planning. Following this, Cmat has invited a recently retired inspector to check the quality of work and also carry out a visit using the new inspection process for GOOD schools. The aim is to ensure that all Cmat schools continue to develop and improve in terms of education, student welfare and school management.



Central Services Team L-R: Caroline Warwick, Steve Archer,  
Julia Leonard, Josh Page, Ian Simpson & Fi Hacking

## The Central Services Team

Headed up by Julia Leonard, the Cmat Central Services Team provides a single point of contact for Cmat members for all finance and human resources issues. Working alongside Julia are Fi Hacking - HR Business Partner, Ian Simpson - Finance Manager and three experienced Finance Assistants, Steve Archer, Josh Page and Caroline Warwick.

Having access to this knowledgeable team is a major benefit for Cmat members, particularly for smaller academies, whose staffing budgets often don't stretch to expert practitioners in individual fields, requiring them instead to recruit multi-taskers, called upon to do a bit of everything from answering telephones to admissions, payroll to parent liaison. Being part of Cmat enables smaller academies to benefit from the same high level of financial and business management as the larger organisations.

The team are able to relieve the individual academies of many of the administrative financial duties, reducing both cost and time and freeing up staff too.

A key aspect of the Central Services Team's remit has been to improve the efficiency of the payroll and HR function including a tendering process for the payroll services. Following a comprehensive process to find the solution most suited to Cmat's unique needs, Salima was selected as the new software and this will be coming on-line soon.

Both The Leadership Team and The Central Services Team share a common goal: to make Cmat the best that it can be and ensure that it operates as effectively as possible to benefit all of its members.

# Cmat Takes Fight for Fairer Funding to London

Cmat members travelled to London in January with Fiona Bruce MP and education colleagues to meet with Minister for Childcare and Education, Sam Gyimah MP, to highlight the serious national inequalities in school financing and seek equal funding for Congleton students.

Representing all stages of education, from early years to nineteen, the group included Cmat's Martin Casserley (Head of Black Firs, Chair of Cheshire East Formula Working Group - Advisors to the Cheshire East School Forum on local funding decisions) and David Hermitt (Executive Principal of CHS, CEO of Cmat, Chair of Cheshire East School Forum) and also Steve Hodgkinson (Leader of New Life Church - nursery provision providers in Congleton), Sarah Burns (Head of Sandbach School), Ann Webb (Head of Eaton Bank Academy) and John Leigh (Head of Sandbach High and Sixth Form College).

Mr Gyimah has been charged with introducing a new national fairer funding process for education. There is currently no standard formula for calculating the funding across the 151 local authorities, with Congleton, as part of Cheshire East, located in the sixth most poorly funded authority in the country. The disparity between the highest funded and lowest is immense, with the ten best supported areas receiving grants in 2015 averaging £6,300 per pupil, compared with an average of just £4,200 received by the poorest. This massive discrepancy of £2,100 represents a difference of over £2.5 million of annual income for an average high school!



Above: Sam Gyimah MP

The group provided the minister with the background to and concrete examples of the impact of this unfair system in their own particular schools. They posed questions about such important issues such as regional differences and the response to national cost pressures such as increased national insurance & pensions.

Coupled with the lower rates of funding, the additional impact on cash-flow of the lagged funding mechanism, whereby funding for students additional to the PAN is not paid up-front but, instead, repaid in instalments over time, was also highlighted. This had caused particular problems for CHS with its rapidly rising student numbers.



Above: L-R: Martin Casserley, Fiona Bruce MP, Sarah Burns, Ann Webb, John Leigh, David Hermitt, Steve Hodgkinson

Martin Casserley, shared Cmat's overall experience of this: *"Local house building has resulted in increased demand for places and, with no local guidelines or requirements as to providing financial support for education provision, housing developers are building next to our popular oversubscribed schools without making any contribution to the infrastructure costs in Cheshire East."*

The group took the opportunity to raise a number of additional issues, including that of the Nursery Educational Grant (which funds three and four year olds but has never been increased since its introduction ten years ago) and also the impact of the Government's policy to extend funding to thirty hours per week. The minister gave an assurance that these matters were currently under review.

Throughout the meeting, the delegation received a favourable response from Mr Gyimah to the issues raised, confirming his awareness of the situation and understanding of their concerns. On conclusion of the session, the minister reassured the group that he would be introducing ways to provide "greater visibility" and ensure that local authorities act in a "consistent way in the new formula".

David Hermitt, summarised the feelings of the group following the meeting:

*"We are pleased that the government has made the commitment to introduce this from 2017. Cmat shares Mr Gyimah's desire to change the model to provide equitable funding across all the Local Authorities. Cheshire East is not asking for more than other authorities, just the same, fair amount of funding."*



For more information, visit: [f40 The Campaign for Fairer Funding in Education](http://www.f40.org.uk)  
<http://www.f40.org.uk>

# The Congleton College Gets Ready for Business

There has been much talk in the media lately of schools failing to prepare students for the real world, with children leaving with a fistful of exam certificates but no practical or vocational skills to help them secure or retain lasting and productive employment. The introduction of the Government's new 'Progress 8' indicator threatens to exacerbate the situation further, making vocational training less attractive due to its focus on a narrow academic curriculum.

Sir Michael Wilshaw, Chief Inspector of Schools and Head of Ofsted raised his own concerns about the issue of UK youth unemployment back in January, warning of the dangers of a 'one size fits all' education system.



*"The country cannot continue to fail half of its future. Vocational training should not be a dumping ground for the disaffected and cater just for the lower ability youngsters."*

The Congleton College is all too aware of the importance of quality and diverse vocational education, not as a 'consolation prize' for those who, for whatever reason, decide against A levels and a university pathway but as a viable alternative for those of all abilities. As such, it has forged strong relationships with local employers from industries including Catering, Childcare/ Play and Development, Fashion and Clothing, and Sport in order to create a range of courses that will inspire and accommodate students looking to learn a trade and get a head start on their career.

Far from the traditional confines of Progress 8, The College strives to offer courses relevant to careers aspired to by young people today.



Alongside the range of mainstream trades, one of the more unusual courses offered is the Football Academy, run in conjunction with Stoke City Football Club, enabling students to combine their studies with a high standard of football training along with a chance to represent The Congleton College in the English Colleges League. There is also an opportunity for students to complete their Level 1 FA coaching badge and complete a work placement in Stoke City's community department.



Effectively bridging the gap between education and work, The College runs Business Breakfasts where companies can come together to network and discuss their needs as employers. Working alongside industry leaders has enabled The College to ensure it equips students with the correct and current skillsets, both in terms of actual skills for individual industries and also the 'soft skills' required across the board - communication, problem solving, leadership, time management etc. - that will make securing and retaining a job far more likely.



The partnership between educator and employer has also led to around forty Post 16 students per week undertaking valuable on-site work placements, many of which have led to permanent employment. These have given students access to hands-on experience, learning at the coal face from expert colleagues.

Determined to carry on its work to guarantee a quality vocational pathway at sixteen and above, The College continues to grow its network of business contacts and develop its range of courses to provide the young people of Congleton and surrounding areas with access to rewarding and successful careers.



A few of The College's many business partners