

SUMMER 2023

# NEWSLETTER

Achievment Beyond Expectations



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# A WORD FROM THE CEO



Horizons Education Trust continues to build as a strong trust in the East Region. We continue to develop many partnerships in the local area in region and at national level to know the direction of future strategy for our special schools.

Our Trust Board recently held a strategy day to look ahead with strategic priorities that will make a difference in all our schools. We know that our staff teams are the most important and valued resource and as such we value their ideas and input as we support emerging leaders and specialist staff for the future. The trust has continued to recruit talented leaders in schools and continues to build team collaboration around our shared values and ambition of 'going beyond expectations'.

You might wonder why values and our ethical behaviours are so important? It is important that we have standards that we can all expect from each other to inspire us to do the very best for our children and young people. Listening is an important quality of course to help us to understand how to approach the delivery of education within our schools. Our parents are foremost to that thinking too as we support them overtime in co - production with the work of developing the social and emotional resilience that being an active part of a community commands.

It is important for staff to have leaders and colleagues they can rely upon and respect so collectively our school teams can inspire and create new possibilities. Our trustees have a strong view that ethical values should be prominent in our focus to embrace our work with children and young people to make a difference.



We have noticed that the education system has had impact from the pandemic but we are now in a good phase of recovery overall. Next term, there will be health reminders for flu vaccinations and to encourage children to have measles vaccinations as this is becoming more prevalent. Our trust is working hard to maintain and strengthen standards and we will look with interest new practice standards that may emerge as part of the SEND transitional reforms. We shall soon publish our Trustees Strategic plan for 2023 to 2026 and our forward plans.

On a personal level, I am noticing within our Trust a feeling of optimism due to the strength of staff recruitment and retention and welfare across the trust. The websites of our schools show many positive outcomes for our children and young people and their enjoyment of learning. We have opened our new building, Riverside Meadows - Wisbech Green and we are now intensifying our work and effort to develop our Alconbury Weald special school project (Prestley Wood Academy) towards an opening in September 2024.

**Kim Taylor OBE**  
**CEO Horizons Education Trust**



**"We continue to build a strong trust for our children and families."**



# RIVERSIDE MEADOWS ACADEMY; ST NEOTS



## Riverside Meadows Academy

Riverside Meadows - St Neots has continued its rapid development and change during the last six months. There have been a number of particular highlights and an Ofsted Inspection (29-30th March, 2023) that had identified that the progress and our intentions and implementation of development were correct:

- In the classrooms students are embracing the ethos and culture of the school. We are developing a focus on academic success and we expect that the examination results will continue to improve over the next two years.
- Teaching and Learning is rapidly improving, and since December 2022 we are in a position where most lessons observed have been Good.
- There have been rapid advancements in the school curriculum, with each subject having a five-year plan and linked medium term plans. There is a strong emphasis on progression of knowledge between different year groups.
- All our teaching staff are qualified teachers or are completing QTS teaching qualifications.
- Safeguarding was judged effective by OFSTED, and we continue to build a strong safeguarding culture. Our DSL team are taking on different safeguarding contextual roles and the school has weekly safeguarding supervision where actions and lessons learned are agreed.
- Behaviour continues to improve rapidly, our numbers of fixed term suspensions and recorded physical interventions are monitored and in line with similar SEMH Special Schools.
- All EHCP records are completed in the legal time frames and the schedules for these meetings have been co-ordinated for the school.
- The Senior Leadership Team have an extensive supervision programme for the school. As a result staff are feeling supported in their roles and responsibilities. is now in place and staff are feeling supported in their roles.
- Student numbers have now increased to 60 at the Riverside Meadows - St Neots site. The school has intervention programmes to support provision.



**ANDREW ARMSTRONG**  
CO-HEAD TEACHER

# RIVERSIDE MEADOWS ACADEMY; WISBECH GREEN



**Riverside Meadows  
Academy**

There has been massive change at the Riverside Meadows - Wisbech Green site.

Pupil numbers have gradually increased for our move to our new site at Barton Road, Wisbech. Our new building was handed over on the 1st September, 2023. The facilities we now have on offer will make a huge difference to our provision.

We have continued to provide a good mix of onsite and off-site provision, running regular curriculum trips to equine therapy, swimming, badminton and archery, as well as one-off educational visits to nature reserves, town centres and local parks to support our learning. Within the school, we continue to grow our staff team, and have added two Assistant Headteachers for September. We have appointed additional Teachers and Teaching Assistants as we grow to around fifty pupils in September 2023.

We have really changed the ethos and culture of the building, ensuring we have more boundaries in place, and increased enormously the engagement in lessons. This has allowed teachers to 'teach' and not just 'manage behaviour'. Pupils have really stepped up to the plate on this front, and the quality of teaching and behaviour around the school has improved thanks to the relentless push by our staff. This has been an extremely challenging time for everyone in the building, but the changes in expectations and standards have definitely proved this to be worth it.

Our curriculum offer continues to develop and grow, and we will take advantage of the new building, its facilities and resources. We look forward to providing future updates on our academic and vocational offer, as well as the results of our planned outdoor learning environment. We are fortunate to have acquired a woodland area from the Local Authority.

We are extremely excited about the development of the school, and the advantages of the new building, which will make a difference to the lives of our young people and families moving forward.

**CHRIS CAREY  
CO-HEAD TEACHER**



# SPRING COMMON ACADEMY



We started the year coming out of a number of years of turbulence due to the impact of COVID. We felt ready to develop our creative practice and be more 'one school', moving away from the 'bubble' expectations of the past.



To support this change, we have deliberately opened up to parents as much as possible. Starting with our open afternoon/BBQ in September we welcomed parents/carers to see what 'day to day' life is like in class. This has continued through the year. With highlights including our Christmas and Summer fetes, both organised by our KS4 pupils, who have evolved an organised approach to running events in the school.

On the theme of offsite activities, our college classroom opened before Christmas. This allowed more of our older students to experience college life and learn in a different environment. The mature coffee shop environment and college library access has led to our older students feeling ready to take their next steps in life.

In January we welcomed 10 additional early years pupils to the school. These younger pupils have settled in well and supported the wider community in finding more places for SEND pupils.

Throughout this year we have promoted the use of Earwig to capture our evidence of progress, and at Christmas we started to share this with parents and it has grown to be an embedded part of each class. Most weeks, hundreds of photos/videos and descriptions are loaded and seen by families.

At Spring Common we continue to evolve our provision to meet the needs of the families and young people we educate. This year has shown that adapting practice, reflecting on learning and evolving knowledge allows us to continue to offer a personalised and creative service to the community, which makes us all feel proud.



**ALEX TOMKINS**  
**HEAD TEACHER**



  
**Ofsted**  
Outstanding  
Provider



# THE TRUST TEAM

## OPERATIONS MANAGER JON-JAMES PANTHER

Jon-James Panther was recently appointed Operations Manager for Horizons Education Trust. He has taken the time to interview with us to tell us more about his time with the Trust and about the role.

### **Can you provide a brief overview of your role and responsibilities within the company?**

I am the Operations Manager for Horizons Education Trust. I have responsibility for the administration function for the all schools, oversee the HR processes and policies and manage the premises and communications teams for the Trust. I also work with the CEO on short and long term planning and strategy for projects within the Trust and work with the Finance Manager on contract management. I am the point of contact for GDPR related issues.



### **Can you share a recent project or achievement that you're particularly proud of?**

In my personal development I would say completing my Business Management degree after six years, especially as I managed to achieve a First. I completed my degree through the Open University, during Covid, which meant that it was all online and very isolated, so the determination you need to get through is immense and it is something I will always be proud of.

At Horizons Education Trust we are currently working on opening two new school sites, Prestley Wood Academy and Riverside Meadows Academy – Wisbech Green which has come with many new learning curves and I'm proud to be part of such an exciting opportunity and future for our children and their families.

### **How does your role contribute to the overall goals and mission of the company?**

Operations is the '*not seen or heard*' part of education. But what we do really matters, whether it's your toilet rolls being refilled, advising someone on the correct way to handle a sickness absence query, communicating with a parent over the telephone or creating a brand new building. Administration, HR and Premises all makes a difference and contributes to the smooth and successful running of our Trust.

### **Are there any specific skills or qualities that are particularly important for success in your role?**

I think to be a successful leader, regardless of sector or department you must always aim to be approachable and supportive. Visibility helps, I don't believe people respond well to faceless email addresses - people want to know who they're talking to. You also need to be able to remain calm in a lot of tense or time-dependant situations. We have a catchphrase in my team '*it'll be fine!*' and it always is.

### **How does your team collaborate and communicate to achieve common objectives?**

As I currently have three, soon to be four, sites to look after, it is a lot of emails, phone calls and Teams meetings but I always make time to go and see my teams and catch up with them in person as often as possible. I believe objectives can only be achieved through appropriate delegation and trust in your team members to know that they can achieve things independently whilst always being available to assist, guide and advise.

### **Are there any industry trends or developments that you find particularly exciting or impactful?**

At the moment the big question on everyone's lips is 'money'. I truly hope that when the next election comes around Education is much higher on the agenda. Our schools need support so that they can continue to support their young people and their staff appropriately. From an Operations perspective, the next big thing that will be impacting all of us is the network shutdown of all analogue telephone lines in December 2025. We have already started these conversations at Horizons Education Trust, but it's going to have massive impact on everyone, not just in Education.

**"Even on the harder days you know you are making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children which feels amazing."**

### **What initially attracted you to this particular job or industry?**

I always wanted to work somewhere I felt I could make a difference and do something that would feel rewarding. Special Needs Education could not be more rewarding! Even on the harder days you know you are making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children which feels amazing. The summer holidays are a positive factor too!

# THE TRUST TEAM

## OPERATIONS MANAGER JON-JAMES PANTHER

**Are there any upcoming projects or initiatives that you're excited to be a part of?**

I am very excited to be able to have the opportunity to be involved with the opening and creation of a brand new school. Prestley Wood Academy is going to be a Special Area School for children aged between 3 and 18 and is being built within the new Alconbury Weald development. It's going to be a nearly net-zero building and will offer pupils top quality sensory spaces, swimming facilities and a beautiful learning environment. I cannot wait to see it develop and flourish.

**How do you continue to grow and develop both personally and professionally?**

I always try to keep up to date with what's going on either through; LinkedIn, podcasts or news bulletins. I am on a lot of email newsletters! Networking is also invaluable. Annual training courses are hugely beneficial, especially in regards to HR and GDPR!

**How do you stay motivated and inspired in your role?**

Crisps and Country Music! But mostly just the reminder that we are working with some of the most vulnerable children and their families and what we do in our schools makes a huge difference to their lives.

**Can you share any hobbies or interests outside of work that bring you joy or help you recharge?**

My cockapoo Teddy, there's nothing quite like the welcome home you get from your dog after a difficult day. I am also a massive Harry Potter fan so anything to do with that, so far I have been to Warner Brother Harry Potter Studios three times (with a fourth visit planned for this year). And obviously, spending time with family and friends.

“*it'll be fine!*”

**"Operations is the 'not seen or heard' part of education. But what we do really matters."**

