FOREWORDS

The Rt Hon Theresa May MP
The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
The Rt Hon The Lord Blunkett

WEST MIDLANDS REPRESENTATIVES

Erdington Academy
Ark Boulton Academy
The Telford Priory School
Etone College
Telford Langley and Telford Park Schools

Fairfax School
Holy Trinity Catholic School
Ellowes Hall Sports College
Selly Park Girls’ School

FEATURES

Review of the Year
Review of Parliament
British politics provides ample material for analysis in the pages of The Parliamentary Review. For Her Majesty's government, our task in the year ahead is clear: to achieve the best Brexit deal for Britain and to carry on our work to build a more prosperous and united country – one that truly works for everyone.

We have already made good progress towards our goal of leaving the EU, so that we take back control of our laws, money and borders, while negotiating a deep and special partnership with it after we have left that is good for jobs and security. The EU Withdrawal Act is now on the statute books to provide legal certainty at the point of exit. We have reached agreement on protecting the rights of EU citizens living here in the UK and British citizens living in the EU, on an implementation period to give businesses time to prepare, and on a fair financial settlement. We are now pressing ahead to reach an agreement with the EU on our future relationship that honours the result of the EU referendum and sets the UK on course for a prosperous future.

Getting the right Brexit deal is essential; but it will not be sufficient on its own to secure a more prosperous future for Britain. We also need to ensure that our economy is ready for what tomorrow will bring. Our Modern Industrial Strategy is our plan to do that. It means government stepping up to secure the foundations of our productivity: providing an education system that delivers the skills our economy needs, improving school standards and transforming technical education. It is all about taking action for the long-term that will pay dividends in the future.

But it also goes beyond that. Government, the private sector and academia working together as strategic partners achieve far more than we could separately. That is why we have set an ambitious goal of lifting UK public and private research and development investment to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027. I believe that Britain can look to the future with confidence. We are leaving the EU and setting a new course for prosperity as a global trading nation. We have a Modern Industrial Strategy that is strengthening the foundations of our economy and helping us to seize the opportunities of the future. We are investing in the public services we all rely on and helping them to grow and improve. Building on our country's great strengths – our world-class universities and researchers, our excellent services sector, our cutting edge manufacturers, our vibrant creative industries, our dedicated public servants – we can look towards a new decade that is ripe with possibility. The government I lead is doing all it can to make that brighter future a reality for everyone in our country.
Foreword

The Rt Hon
Theresa May MP
Prime Minister

British politics provides ample material for analysis in the pages of The Parliamentary Review. For Her Majesty’s Government, our task in the year ahead is clear: to achieve the best Brexit deal for Britain and to carry on our work to build a more prosperous and united country – one that truly works for everyone.

We have already made good progress towards our goal of leaving the EU, so that we take back control of our laws, money and borders, while negotiating a deep and special partnership with it after we have left that is good for jobs and security. The EU Withdrawal Act is now on the statute books to provide legal certainty at the point of exit. We have reached agreement on protecting the rights of EU citizens living here in the UK and British citizens living in the EU, on an implementation period to give businesses time to prepare, and on a fair financial settlement. We are now pressing ahead to reach an agreement with the EU on our future relationship that honours the result of the EU referendum and sets the UK on course for a prosperous future.

Getting the right Brexit deal is essential; but it will not be sufficient on its own to secure a more prosperous future for Britain. We also need to ensure that our economy is ready for what tomorrow will bring. Our Modern Industrial Strategy is our plan to do that. It means government stepping up to secure the foundations of our productivity: providing an education system that delivers the skills our economy needs, improving school standards and transforming technical education. It is all about taking action for the long-term that will pay dividends in the future.

But it also goes beyond that. Government, the private sector and academia working together as strategic partners achieve far more than we could separately.

That is why we have set an ambitious goal of lifting UK public and private research and development investment to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027.

I believe that Britain can look to the future with confidence. We are leaving the EU and setting a new course for prosperity as a global trading nation. We have a Modern Industrial Strategy that is strengthening the foundations of our economy and helping us to seize the opportunities of the future. We are investing in the public services we all rely on and helping them to grow and improve. Building on our country’s great strengths – our world-class universities and researchers, our excellent services sector, our cutting edge manufacturers, our vibrant creative industries, our dedicated public servants – we can look towards a new decade that is ripe with possibility. The government I lead is doing all it can to make that brighter future a reality for everyone in our country.

“Providing an education system that delivers the skills our economy needs, improving school standards and transforming technical education”
If you had asked me last year where would I most like to work, I would not have hesitated: education. Nothing is more important than helping children to discover a love of learning and to leave school happy, well rounded and with all the qualifications they need for whatever they want to do. That is what England’s 450,000 teachers are devoted to.

I have spent my first months as education secretary visiting as many nurseries, schools, colleges and universities as possible and seeing for myself the contribution offered and challenges faced by our early years professionals, teachers and lecturers. They are the ones in the front line of our drive to improve education for every child.

My mission is for every child to have a world-class education and the chance to fulfil their potential, whatever their background. Thanks to the hard work of heads and teachers we’ve made huge progress.

Since coming into government in 2010, 1.9 million more children are being taught in good or outstanding schools - representing 86 per cent of pupils compared to 66 per cent in 2010. Since the phonics screening checks were introduced, 154,000 more six year olds are on track to become fluent readers; and we have seen the attainment gap narrow by at least ten per cent at both primary and secondary school.

We have reformed GCSEs, creating a new gold standard in qualifications, and A levels to better prepare students for university. Record numbers of disadvantaged 18 year olds are now going to university for full-time study.

These are real tangible achievements that we will build on as we continue to improve the education that every child receives.

But in providing that education, I know that the most important factor is the person at the front of the classroom. I want this to be a profession which draws the best, most gifted and committed teachers and then develops and keeps them.

However, it’s clear too many teachers are having to cope with a workload that makes huge demands of them before they even set foot inside the classroom. Working with Ofsted, we are challenging excessive and unnecessary marking and data collection, as well as reforming our accountability system to make sure good schools are not burdened by multiple inspections and multiple demands for data. This will free up teachers to do what they came into the profession to do: teach.

One of the most important ways government can improve education is to give great schools the freedom to innovate and, then, to share their ideas and best practice. I’m pleased this year’s Parliamentary Review gives a platform to some brilliant and innovative schools.

I look forward to continuing to work with this whole sector so we can make sure every child, in every classroom, can fulfil their potential.

“One of the most important ways government can improve education is to give great schools the freedom to innovate”
This summer has been a very unusual time for many young people and their parents. Unusual, not because of the nerve-wracking wait for examination results that takes place each year but because this is the first set of full results since the process was changed substantially.

Very simply, instead of A* to C grade as a judgment of academic ability to move on to post-16 education, as opposed to a vocational route, a 1 to 9 scale is now in place, with nine being akin to an A*, although judgment on exact comparators is very difficult.

Final exams, without the previous assessment process, will benefit those who have an extremely good retentive memory. I did, when I undertook my own qualifications in my six-year battle to get the qualifications to go to university. Others aren’t so fortunate.

So, in the Labour Party’s review of the present education system, there are many strands to pull together. My own review on behalf of the previous leader of the Labour Party back in 2014 was very much about how to reinforce partnership and collaboration, concentrating on standards and action in the classroom rather than structures.

The National Audit Office estimate that around £745 million has been spent over recent years on academisation of schools. For some, this has resulted in the change needed, the boost required to bring about substantial improvements. For the system as a whole, according to the Office for Standards in Education, fragmentation and “atomisation” has led to a very mixed picture.

In Labour’s manifesto for the election in June last year, a promise was given that there would be a National Education Service. While this clearly cannot mean centralising decision-making in Whitehall, equality of opportunity and a relentless drive from the centre to improve standards would be welcome. But for me, the truly “big” idea is to place further emphasis on lifelong learning.

It is self-evident, not least in the responses from business, that a greater emphasis on technical education is needed. The so-called T Levels have proved extremely difficult to scale up from a small pilot. The Apprenticeship Levy, which is a good idea, has been handled with a degree of stubbornness which beggars belief. Why not redistribute the substantial underspend to those businesses willing to implement positive change?

It is the world of tomorrow that both major political parties should be addressing. The development of robotics and the implications of geo-political change, not least in the replacement of oil as a key driver of industrial and transport needs, all bring very real challenges.

At its simplest, we’re talking about a further wave of economic, industrial and social upheaval. We’ve all talked a lot about this, but preparation for the seismic change which is coming is significant only by its absence.

While children aged 10 and 11 struggle with the exact name of a particular type of verb, the world is passing us by. In the post–Brexit era, it is a revolution not just in the delivery of the basics in the classroom, necessary as that is, but also a vision of the kind of education for and throughout life, which liberates the talent of each individual, and addresses the economic needs of the nation and the challenge of global competition.

Let us hope that both the Labour and Conservative frontbench can move beyond the structural tinkering and political meddling, into something worthy of Britain in the mid-21st century.
It’s been over two years since the country voted to leave the European Union, but Brexit continues to hang over British politics like an all-encompassing dark, brooding cloud, discombobulating established relationships and upturning traditional verities wherever we look.

Social class no longer largely determines how you vote in the UK. The latest polls suggest the Tories now enjoy a lead among working-class voters. They’ve always won a chunk of working class votes – Disraeli called them his “Angels in Marble” – but never a majority.

As for Labour, even under its most left-wing leader ever, it now garners considerable support among the professional middle classes, especially in the major metropolitan conurbations.

The reason for this psephological seachange is Brexit. If you voted Leave, you are now more likely to vote Tory; if Remain, Labour.

Brexit is now the dividing line within Labour and the Conservatives. It splits the cabinet and shadow cabinet, backbenchers of both parties and their voters in the country. The Tory divisions are more obvious to see because they are the governing party and make big news. But Jeremy Corbyn has managed to lose 103 frontbenchers, often through Brexit-related resignations, which doesn’t quite have the impact of Boris Johnson or David Davis walkouts, but must be something of a record nevertheless.

Brexit has also induced something of rigor mortis on both frontbenches. For nearly all of the past parliamentary year, cabinet ministers and leading Labour spokespeople have been unable to answer the simplest questions on our post-Brexit state when it comes to the customs union, the Irish border, immigration policy and the single market. Only recently, with the Article 50 deadline looming, has some clarity emerged – and not always. I believe this widespread prevarication has added to voter disillusion.

Just as important, nearly all non-Brexit matters have been swept into a Brexit-induced Bermuda Triangle. This is understandable. But it has added to the gulf between parliament and the people.

The impact of Brexit on the parliamentary process has been generally unpredictable and often amusing. Left-wing Remainers now speak of the House of Lords as a bastion of democracy. Right-wing Leavers sound increasingly like peasants with pitchforks, determined to bring the whole edifice of the upper house tumbling down.

Jeremy Corbyn, who’s spent his political career railing against the iniquities of the market economy, now poses as the champion of business (up to a point). Brexiteer Tories regularly mutter anti-business sentiments in unprintable language.

Overarching all this turmoil and uncertainty, as I explained in his Parliamentary Review last year, is the resurgence of the two-party system in England, another consequence of Brexit. At the 2017 general election, the Leaver Right collapsed into the Tories and the Remainer Left flocked to Mr Corbyn’s Labour party. It is beyond strange that the two main parties should be doing so well when many regard them as weaker, less talented and more divided than they’ve been in living memory. But they got easily over 80 per cent of the English vote between them in 2017 and all polls since suggest that is the new status quo.

The fundamental parliamentary fact in this post-referendum era is that there is no majority for what hardliners on either side of the Brexit divide would like. So, when it comes to determining the eventual shape of Brexit, parliament is very much in the driving seat, as the government has found out the hard way.

The problem is it’s not sure what parliament wants that shape to be.

Business might despair at what it sees as an increasingly dysfunctional political system. But it should take comfort from the fact that economics and politics are, for the moment, going their separate ways. No matter how much you might think politicians are mucking it up, the economy in general and business in particular continue to defy them.

I have thought for sometime that business and the economy are in much better shape than established opinion would have it. There were signs in the early summer of 2018 that this was indeed the case. But, by the time you read this, you’ll have a much better idea if I’m right. Keep your fingers crossed – not for my sake, but for the country’s!
Championing social mobility in our state schools had been put at the forefront of the agenda.

When the academic year began in the autumn of 2017, the political landscape for education was still being shaped by the indecisive outcome of the general election.

The lack of a parliamentary majority meant that there would be no bold initiatives or major changes. The all-consuming question of Brexit also added to the sense of ordinary business being put on hold.

So, for the first time in many years, the autumn began without an education secretary delivering a raft of new measures for schools. It was a new academic year with no new school legislation. And in terms of political concern over education, the most pressing issue was in universities, with the promise of a major review of tuition fees.

That did not mean that the then-education secretary Justine Greening had nothing to worry about for schools. She was pressed relentlessly by school leaders on two key questions: worries about school funding and claims of shortages of teachers.

Head teachers had been mounting public campaigns over pressures on school budgets, warning parents about a worsening financial situation and often calling on parents to make voluntary cash contributions.

Ms Greening was not able to deliver on any major injection of new cash – although in the summer she had been able to reshuffle her department’s budget so that £1.3 billion extra was moved to frontline school spending. Her readjustments meant that funding would not decrease for the next two years, but head teachers complained that school incomes were still not keeping up with rising costs.

But what she was able to pursue was a significant change in how the school budget was allocated. As well as concern about the overall size of the school budget, there had been longstanding unhappiness at how it was shared out across England.

An example given by the Department for Education was that a school in Coventry could receive £510 more per pupil each year than a school with similar levels of deprivation in Plymouth.

Ms Greening described this as a “manifest unfairness” and in September pushed forward with the national funding formula, which began the process of delivering a fairer allocation of funding and removing historic anomalies in local budget levels.

There had been broad support for the principle of introducing a fairer funding system, but against a background of deepening concerns over overall budget shortages, the proposals had a muted reception.

In terms of Ms Greening’s policy priorities, social mobility was a theme to which she repeatedly returned. She spoke of “unlocking the talents”
of all young people and extending opportunities to all communities across the country.

The education secretary, the first comprehensive-educated Conservative education secretary, had warned that too often there was a waste of the ability of young people from poorer backgrounds.

She argued for stronger and more co-ordinated links between education and businesses and local organisations that could help to improve the horizons for young people who might not feel that they were competing on a level playing field.

It tapped into a growing concern about a new geography of disadvantage, with worries about underachieving schools in the north of England and a sense that the ladder of opportunity was not evenly extended. There were concerns about schools in isolated coastal towns slipping behind and white working-class communities missing out on the pathway to university.

“Where you start too often decides where you finish,” Ms Greening told a conference in December. But the push for social mobility was clouded by the mass resignation in the same month of the board of the government’s own Social Mobility Commission, with complaints about a lack of substantive progress.

There were also reports of differences of opinion within government. There were questions about when and how the university tuition fee review, promised by the prime minister, would be established. There was also speculation about the extent of Ms Greening’s enthusiasm for the promise to expand academic selection in more grammar schools.

When it came to the cabinet reshuffle in January, Ms Greening was replaced by Damian Hinds, who writes the foreword for this publication. There were suggestions that Greening had turned down the offer of an alternative post in government, but either way she was heading for the backbenches.

Hinds extends hand to teachers but faces questions on funding

Damian Hinds arrived in his new department in January 2018 and was immediately faced with questions about some of the most contentious issues for schools: worries about funding, teacher shortages and whether he would pursue the expansion of grammar schools.

But his approach so far has been to build bridges and to offer olive branches, rather than to generate provocative headlines. Whether this continues is likely to depend on what happens next with those thorny issues around funding, teachers’ pay and staffing levels.

The education secretary seems to have focused on tackling some of the practical problems that have particularly annoyed teachers and that might have exacerbated staffing shortages.

In his first major speech to the teaching profession, at the Association of School and College Leaders’ annual conference in Birmingham, Mr Hinds promised to cut back on unnecessary bureaucracy and to reduce workloads for teachers.

Secretary of State for Education Damian Hinds visits the School of Education, University of Bristol
He also pledged not to make any more changes to the testing and exam systems – although those already in the pipeline would continue. The most significant of these changes still working their way through the system have been the changes to GCSEs, with tougher content and a grading system that has switched from letters to numbers, with 9 now the highest grade.

A raft of popular subjects, such as history, geography, physics and biology, have changed to the new format this summer.

But the underlying intention of Mr Hinds’ message was that there would be no more unnecessary changes or extra pressure on teachers. He wanted teaching to be a more attractive career and wanted to encourage more young people to enter the profession and to discourage current staff from leaving.

So far it has been a balancing act from Mr Hinds as education secretary. He has pushed ahead with traditionalist policies already announced by the government, such as expanding existing grammar schools. And he has made no promises of extra money.

At the same time, he has struck a teacher-friendly note, recognising their annoyance at excessive paperwork and promising to put a freeze on any new announcements that would cause further changes to the exam system.

Mr Hinds is also responsible for higher education, and he will be increasingly focused on the review into overhauling the university tuition fee system. This will report back in 2019, and there will be intense political interest in the outcome.

Grammar schools might be relatively small in number, but they have always played a big symbolic role in arguments over the direction of England’s school system.

Going into the general election in June 2017, the Conservatives were committed to ending the ban on creating new grammar schools and promised to build a new generation of selective schools, adding to the existing 163.

But the outcome of the election, with no parliamentary majority for Theresa May’s government, meant that the opening of new grammars was put to one side. The parliamentary arithmetic meant that changing the law would not be possible.

While Justine Greening, the education secretary, accepted that the ban on new selective schools would stay, there was less certainty about would happen to the rest of the grammar school plan.

As well as building new schools, there were proposals to allow existing grammars to expand or to set up branches on other sites. There had already been a contentious test case, in which the Weald of Kent Grammar School in Tonbridge had been able to open an “annexe” in another town ten miles away.

Other grammar schools wanted funding to increase their intake on their existing sites. Even though there is a
ban on new grammars, many current grammars have been growing in size in recent years.

The decision on extra support for grammars seemed to have been put on hold during the autumn, with Ms Greening focusing on social mobility as the biggest challenge for England’s school system. The expansion of selective places remained official policy, but there seemed to be no imminent sign of it being implemented.

But her successor Damian Hinds, in an announcement in May, decided to press ahead with the expansion of selective places. He confirmed that there would be £50 million per year that existing grammar schools could use to build capacity for extra places.

To bid for the money, schools would have to show that they were working to make sure that disadvantaged youngsters were not being excluded from access to the new places.

Mr Hinds said that funding more places in grammar schools would increase choice for families and was part of the government’s wider plans to create more good school places.

The announcement was met with hostility by the opposition parties and teachers’ unions.

Angela Rayner, Labour’s shadow education secretary, accused the Conservatives of being obsessed with grammar schools and said that increasing selective places would do nothing to improve social mobility.

Head teachers struggle with recruiting teachers

This year’s school staffing census showed that the number of teachers had fallen at a time when pupil numbers were continuing to rise. The number of state school teachers in England is at its lowest since 2013.

It is not simply a question of getting enough teachers into the classroom, head teachers said repeatedly. It is about getting staff with the right specialist skills. The quality of teaching staff is as much of an issue as the quantity of potential recruits. And there were many stories from head teachers of advertising for staff and getting no suitable candidates even applying.

Schools relying on temporary staff to fill the gaps faced an additional financial cost, as well as the disruption of not having permanent people in post to teach a subject. There was an annual bill of over £800 million for using supply agencies, with fees and charges on top of salaries.

Education secretary Damian Hinds has publicly acknowledged the need to make teacher recruitment a priority. But it is a long-term problem, with new teachers needing time to be recruited.
and trained. It is also a challenge that is shaped by the rest of the job market, with teaching traditionally tending to become less popular as a career when employment levels are higher.

The House of Commons’ public accounts committee admonished the government for failing to respond to the problem in previous years and for having allowed the recruitment problems to keep deteriorating without intervening. “A crisis is brewing in English classrooms, but government action to address it has been sluggish and incoherent,” said committee chair Meg Hillier.

In response the Department for Education said that 32,000 trainee teachers had been recruited and that financial incentives had been offered to attract the “brightest and best” into teaching.

Ofsted backs schools wanting to ban mobile phones

If head teachers want to ban mobile phones from schools, they have been promised the full support of Ofsted’s chief inspector, Amanda Spielman.

For many heads, teachers and parents, poor behaviour remains the “number one concern,” Ms Spielman told an education conference in June. This might include low-level disruption in the classroom, as well as bullying or other serious examples of bad behaviour.

But Ms Spielman said that it had to be taken seriously, as poor behaviour could blight the chances of other pupils in the class. “There is nothing kind about letting a few pupils spoil school for everyone else,” she said.

Such problems with behaviour are being exacerbated by mobile phones and technology, she said.

“There’s no doubt that technology has made the challenge of low-level disruption even worse,” said the Ofsted chief.

“I am yet to be convinced of the educational benefits of all-day access to Snapchat and the like – the place of mobile phones in the classroom seems to be dubious at best.”

Free school rules keep limit on faith schools

When the Conservatives went into the general election last year they promised a change to the admission rules for free schools that would have enabled the opening of more faith schools in England’s state education sector.

The manifesto promised to end the 50 per cent cap on the proportion of places in free schools that could be allocated on the grounds of religion.

The intention was for new free schools to have a mixed intake and not to
allow a school to draw all its pupils from a single religion. But it had been a barrier that had discouraged some religious denominations from opening free schools.

The Conservatives, wanting more free schools and wanting to open the door to more faith schools, decided that this 50 per cent cap was not serving a useful purpose and should be abolished. The manifesto described the limit on faith-based admissions as “unfair and ineffective” and committed the party to replacing it.

So when a decision was announced in May 2018, it took many by surprise.

Mr Hinds announced against expectations that the cap would stay in place. But he said that new faith schools could be created through local authorities and become “voluntary aided” schools, and these could allocate 100% of places on the basis of religion. It meant going back to a system that predated free schools.

The announcement from Mr Hinds contained a number of unanticipated changes in direction. It meant that the Conservatives had ditched their manifesto promise to change the rules for free schools. But it also indicated that councils would be able to open their own new faith schools, circumventing the free school model. It suggested that free schools would no longer have a virtual monopoly on opening new schools.

Keeping the restrictions might bar some new faith-based free schools, but the announcement paved the way for a new generation of faith schools to be set up by local authorities. The “voluntary aided” classification of school, in existence since the 1940s, was being revived.

Less pressure for schools to become academies

There can be few more-striking examples of how much education policies can change than the approach towards academies.

It was only two years ago that Nicky Morgan, the then-education secretary, was pursuing a policy that would have required all state schools in England to become academies, regardless of their quality or whether parents, governors or head teachers approved.

Academies are state-funded schools that operate outside of local authority networks, sometimes as standalone academies and sometimes as part of chains known as “multi-academy trusts”.

The plan for the compulsory conversion of all schools into academies was controversial and short-lived, failing to convince Conservative backbenchers, as well as facing strong criticism from the opposition parties and teachers’ unions.

The proposal for so-called “forced academisation” was dropped after a matter of weeks, in a major U-turn.
But there still seemed to be a strong current behind the push for more schools to become academies. High-achieving schools were nudged towards leading groups of academies; when schools appeared to be struggling, they were also often steered towards academy status as part of their recovery.

But that had been the thrust of David Cameron’s government’s approach to schools. Under Theresa May there had never quite seemed to be as much enthusiasm for academies.

That impression was made clearer in a speech by the education secretary Damian Hinds to the National Association of Head Teachers conference in Liverpool, when he spoke of wanting to end the use of academy status as a kind of threat or punishment for schools.

“I want to move away from forced academisation being seen as this punitive threat that can hang over schools that are not failing,” Mr Hinds told the conference.

He told head teachers that “fear of being forcibly turned into an academy” could contribute to “stress and anxiety” for school staff.

But even if the current government is no longer such a cheerleader for academies, it still has to oversee a school system in which academies are a prominent component.

The long drive in support of academies has changed the secondary school landscape in particular. Figures from the National Audit Office in February showed that 72 per cent of secondary schools in England are now academies. But in the primary sector, only 27 per cent of schools have become academies. Because there are many more primary than secondary schools, this means that, overall, 35 per cent of state schools are academies.

As the National Audit Office observed, this means that local authorities remain responsible for many primary schools in their area but might have much less involvement in secondary schools.

That in turn raises questions about strategic planning between local authorities and multi-academy trusts, with the National Audit Office calling for more attention to be paid to how to create an “integrated, efficient and effective” school system, in which academies and local authority schools can work together.

With less pressure for schools to become academies, the split system between local authorities and academies seems to be a long-term arrangement. It is no longer a case of waiting for local education authorities to wither away, leaving a fully academised system in their wake.

Instead – as the following Parliamentary Review articles indicate – local authority schools and academies are both likely to be here for the foreseeable future.
Transforming through tradition, Erdington Academy opened in September 2016, replacing the “failing” school of Kingsbury School and Sports College. The new academy became part of Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust, or FMAT, a group of four academies with the same mission: to develop articulate, ambitious and resilient students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes to excel in modern Britain.

Rooted in traditional values and approaches, the vision was to ensure that the children of Erdington had the same educational experiences of their “more affluent” peers to the north in Sutton Coldfield, where the flagship academy in the trust, Fairfax, is based. The belief that no child’s destiny should be determined by demographics or postcode is a governing focus of Erdington Academy.

Context and challenges

Situated in a diverse community with nationally recognised high levels of unemployment, deprivation and low aspirations, Erdington Academy is in a constituency with significant socio-economic challenges – nearly 60 per cent of our students are eligible for free school meals and there are 46 different languages spoken. The predecessor school had a recent history of poor behaviour, low staff morale and low achievement. This led to a lack of community confidence in the school, a staff exodus and a rapidly falling roll. In February 2015, experienced head teacher Mark Rhatigan was appointed and the school received significant support from the trust. The newly formed leadership team, supported by leaders at Fairfax Multi-Academy Trust, immediately focused on ensuring high standards of behaviour, effort and presentation of students’ work and themselves as smart learners.
Students were met by the new head teacher in a series of assemblies and the high expectations were outlined explicitly – it was expected that they would walk into lessons in silence and begin work straight away.

The expectation of standing up in silence when the deputies or head teacher enter the room was also explained. This was now a “no-touching” school – play-fighting saw a same-day detention and students are seated in an assigned, teacher-designated order during lessons. Mobile phones were banned and are rarely now seen at the academy. Students rose to meet these expectations – they craved this disciplined approach and wore their uniform smartly with pride, following our traditional values of courtesy, manners and respect. Senior staff were highly visible, relentlessly supporting teaching staff in changing the culture and standards. In the context of Erdington, many of our students may not have such routines at home and school provided them with a sense of stability and structure. Structure does liberate and we have built on this in 2017-18 with our “silent start”, whereby all KS3 students assemble in the playground and walk into lessons in silence together with their teacher after break and lunch. Visitors have been very impressed by our disciplined, purposeful atmosphere.

Teaching for excellence

This climate for learning establishes the platform to focus on learning and progress. We did developmental work with staff on planning around the teacher standards and focusing on particular areas, such as visible learning objectives and success criteria, alongside a traditional structure to lessons, which ensured high quality outcomes.

Staff undertook training to plan engaging lessons and developed thorough bespoke feedback. Every teacher focused on their own development to improve areas of their teaching as a group of dedicated professionals and we gave additional support to those who didn’t quite meet our high standards. A system of coaching supported staff effectively through bite-sized observations, feedback, joint-planning and role-play and rehearsals, successful techniques from US charter schools that we adopted and somewhat anglicised. Staff welcomed the development opportunities. They were now teaching more effectively and with more purpose than in previous years, taking more authority for the lessons rather than allowing learners to discover for themselves in a more auto-didactic environment – lessons are for learning and our prime focus now is
to develop our teachers as “subject experts”. This has been further developed during 2017-2018 through our mastery approach – a model of direct instructional teaching focusing on developing excellence that we know meets the demands of national syllabus reforms and the gaps in cultural knowledge that our students have. Students have certainly noticed a difference and we regularly meet with parents, guardians and carers to share developments with them and listen to their views in our “Parents’ Forum”.

Ambition for all

Broadening the horizons for our students is fundamental to our mission. At Erdington Academy, we want the very best for our students and we expect students to challenge themselves to go on to excel in life. We set ambitious targets and support students to strive to meet them. We believe that every student can rise to the challenges set for them and we are unashamedly ambitious for every child. Our extracurricular opportunities in sport and creative arts subjects, our house system and competitions, as well as our drive to develop qualities our employer partners value through our “Erdington Edge” programme, aim to give students that particular edge and resilience that are sought-after commodities in today’s fast-paced world. We aim to show students what excelling in today’s society looks like – from trips and sustained links to industry-leading employers such as Jaguar Land Rover, visits to see world-class higher education institutions such as Oxford University or involving themselves in cricket at Edgbaston or rugby with Wasps RFC – our students enjoy a rounded and meaningful education with plenty of extracurricular stimuli. Furthermore, we are involved with the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and The Prince’s Trust. We want our students to be unbound in their potential, irrespective of their background or upbringing.

The pursuit of excellence

We expect students to have pride in their achievements, be they academic, sporting or creative. We are never complacent when it comes to standards of uniform and behaviour, ensuring that students present themselves as we expect and are respectful and courteous to all. Each student’s custom-made workbook provides examples of the excellent standards of work we expect every day and denotes our investment in high-quality exercise books and learning materials. Our expectation and support for students to speak “clearly and confidently” as part of our literacy strategy enables students to feel academically confident after Erdington Academy.

In our second year of operation, we are fully staffed and have regained the confidence of the community, demonstrated by our ever-growing waiting lists in all year groups. We are oversubscribed for September 2018. We were delighted with our students’ GCSE results in 2017 as they made progress in line with national averages, but we have ambitions to be even better as we move forward.
When Herminder Channa was recruited to become Principal of Ark Boulton Academy she knew that she had bought into a very tough job indeed. The school previously known as Golden Hillock School had known crisis after crisis. From a stand-alone academy it became part of the Parkview Academy Chain. Concerns raised by Ofsted meant the Department of Education put an interim executive board in place to search for a new sponsor. In 2014 the academy had been judged by Ofsted as inadequate. In September 2015 it became part of Ark – a network of 38 schools, 18 of them secondaries. Herminder Channa took over at that point. She came to Ark Boulton from Nishkam High School in the centre of Birmingham. In 2014 under her leadership Ofsted had rated the school to be outstanding across the board. Her first task at Ark Boulton was to deal with a situation where suspensions and a dependence on supply staff had added to the sense of crisis.

I firmly believe that education is the most powerful weapon for changing the world. This academy, however, did not just have to address the current poor educational provision and staffing crisis: there was a bigger challenge in how we were to win back the trust of our parents and teacher communities.

Upon taking over the academy it was paramount that all stakeholders subscribed to a shared vision. If the academy and community were going to progress, as leaders we needed to acknowledge and confront the challenges of the past, understand
more deeply the cultural barriers faced by communities in moving forward, while building trust and creating a shared vision all stakeholders believed in.

My vision was to lead an academy where pupils truly believed they were part of something bigger and understood their moral and social responsibilities; their actions or inactions had a direct positive or negative impact on the society in which they lived. For academy staff it was crucial to create a culture where they felt they were able to make a difference beyond academic standards. Put into practice it was an opportunity to create a real climate of service within our community, supporting those who were less fortunate and developing an understanding of current challenges which needed to be overcome one action at a time. From this thinking the academy vision was formed, embodied by our belief that “it takes a whole community to bring up a child”.

All pupils who attend Ark Boulton Academy will go on to university or leave equipped to pursue a high-quality apprenticeship and/or career of their choosing. Consequently our pupils are able to look after parents, become role models for younger siblings and help their community learn new skills.

The clear vision was well received by all. However, I was fully aware that although parents felt optimistic, they were also cautious and mistrustful of the new management. Teachers were hopeful of change but pessimistic as they had heard it all before. However, our pupils took another change in academy name, a new principal, new teachers and a new uniform all in their stride.

The strength of being part of a multi-academy meant that very quickly the academy was able to provide training for staff, implement tested curriculum models, set up accurate data systems, introduce robust testing materials and provide a network of peers across 18 secondary academies that could provide support and experiences via learning communities, phone, email and video link. The impact of the MAT and the speed in which systems and processes had been implemented, embedded and consistently used and applied by academy staff had to

"It takes a whole community to bring up a child"
be seen to be believed. Our Ofsted report from October 2015 noted that almost all of our staff said that they know what the academy is trying to achieve and that they are proud to be working there.

The changes noted were seen as clearly planned and intentional where all involved were clear about their role and responsibilities. They had also been given the tools and confidence to execute these roles to the best of their ability. The academy was getting stronger, outcomes were rapidly improving, first-choice applications had tripled, and the academy was fully staffed. By term four the academy had come out of special measures and was judged to be good in every Ofsted category.

I know some feel that as a principal in a large MAT, autonomy can be lost. I strongly disagree. None of the above would have been possible without Ark. Each step change had been well organised and rehearsed by Ark to ensure the sequence of events was the right one for maximum impact. Some events may have taken longer to perfect than others, but we knew what needed to be practised and supported by Ark network leads until we got it right. I believe autonomy is about how leaders in education role-model the traits we would want to see in future generations, ensure communities feel listened to and valued, and ensure staff feel loved and appreciated.

Trust was now building between all stakeholders and teachers becoming more confident in their classroom craft. But this was only half the job done. To see our academy vision in action, we launched the “Ark Boulton Virtues Curriculum” in September 2016. We supported our teachers to develop their skills beyond teaching and learning – as leaders it was our responsibility to create the conditions which allowed our staff to role-model and practise the virtues we wanted to see in our pupils. Teachers at Ark Boulton care with compassion, listen with love and help with humility. These qualities are now visible in our pupils.

Our academy has evolved past just being an educational establishment and has changed beyond recognition. Teachers are responsible for shaping the minds and attitudes of the next generation. These are young people who are strong in character and resilient, who are humble, compassionate and understand they have a responsibility to give back, upskill and leave their communities in a stronger place for the generation that follows.

“Teachers at Ark Boulton care with compassion, listen with love and help with humility. These qualities are now visible in our pupils.”
The Telford Priory School

The Telford Priory School is a merger of two special measure schools, which opened in 2015. This meant there were two sets of staff, parents and students under one roof. Mergers are complicated endeavours and one must ensure everyone buys into the ethos, rules and ways of working. Head teacher Stacey Jordan therefore resolved to create The Telford Priory School as a super-powered centre of excellence in the community that raises the aspirations of all.

Community superheroes

It has been an uphill battle to establish ourselves as a community hub. At the start of our post-merger journey we received much opposition and struggled to ingratiate ourselves with the wider public. We now hold termly community events which present our students as leaders who host activities to raise money for charity – last year we gave £4,000 to charity.

Our school image is that of the superhero. Across the grounds one can see quotes displayed reiterating the idea that a hero can be anyone. We want to be heroes, to be the best we can be for the benefit of the community. We cater to the broadest range of student abilities, with a high number of SEND students and almost half who are disadvantaged, but the backgrounds of our pupils are just that – backgrounds. We are masters of our fate and have complete ownership of our futures. These principles are very much embedded into our school ethos.
While many support staff are being forced out of schools due to budget cuts, we have revived structures within the school including the appointment of a full-time careers and enterprise officer who is our strategic lead on ensuring all students have access to local and national businesses and higher educational opportunities at universities nationwide. We want students to tap into the world beyond. By changing our structures and keeping this strong support staff team, we are ensuring students can thrive in areas outside of curriculum learning and have secure pathways to their future. We have an extracurricular co-ordinator providing opportunities in over 50 clubs per week. Furthermore, The Telford Priory School is built upon the same site as a leisure centre, providing access to excellent sporting and fitness centres, performing arts venues and music equipment.

We have a “more able” co-ordinator who ensures the most able students can visit universities and participate in the “brilliance programme”, which has included visits from Cambridge alumnae. Those on the programme annually visit universities to observe the goings-on of higher education, from local high-calibre universities to those of the Russell Group and Oxbridge.

We naturally cover the academic side of education aiming for the highest standard, but our students all need to be “hooked” into education and have access to a range of pathways that encourage engaged and productive learning.

Raising expectations

There has been considerable challenge in establishing a merger school. While we are still finding our own identity independent of our predecessor schools, to be one’s own superhero underlines everything we do. To be this hero one must persevere and a quotation from Winston Churchill – “Success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts” – is proudly displayed across the school.

Many of our students have low expectations and aspirations and we must build up their resilience and teach them perseverance – it is okay to know failure, and this does not define us. It is wonderful to see these children become student – and community – leaders, supervising activities on weekends and becoming voluntarily involved in business enterprise. Students start understanding that they can be whoever they choose to be; there are no limitations.

Making the change

Manifesting this change in student personal perception came from a strong belief in what a school can achieve. I have the unwavering belief that with a senior team sharing a clear moral drive and values-driven focus, we can make the Priory a place where all students can achieve the very best and not be affected by factors outside of their control.

In my first year I was told that my expectations for students were too
I do not think this is true – the right provision and support means you can become anything you want. I want our students to know they can get into Oxbridge; there are simply no limits to what they can achieve.

My team have established very good connections within the community, from the mayoral office to local businesses, and use social media to reach out to those around us. I run an “open door” school encouraging staff to be available to support students – and my staff go above and beyond. I invite parents and prospective parents into the school regularly so they can see that our children are thriving. I ensure our school is open during holidays so that students and members of our local community can make use of our excellent provisions. We even provide opportunities for parents to have stalls at our fayres.

Appeal
To maintain our appeal, our school finishes early, facilitating afternoon activities. Even as I write this in the early evening, I can see from my window students practising netball at the leisure centre and going to art club and can hear the senior choir rehearsing in the hall. We want our children to not only learn but also receive training to enable them to be successful leaders – to this end we promote our school as a fun learning environment with superb facilities to appeal to new students. Not only do we care for each child; we create the environment in which children help each other. As part of our community engagement we work with local primary schools on a myriad of projects from year 2 to year 6 utilising our student leaders and specialist staff for MFL, arts, music, sport, English, maths and STEM projects.

Future
We want every student to know they can have a fantastic future and can move forwards as positive, resilient members of society. Students are reminded that there are countless pathways to success which need not be restricted by nationally assigned curricula – one can excel and lead in so many forms. For students, the school provides a doorway to their future – we must help them understand there is more to life than selfies and “fitting in” with cliques. They must know there is a limitless world beyond where anything can be achieved if it is believed – that they can truly become their own superheroes.

“A hero can be anyone”
Based in Nuneaton, Etone College is a secondary school in the Matrix Academy Trust for pupils aged 11-19. What makes this school unique is the speed with which it has progressed. They have recently attained a “good” rating by Ofsted, which is just one of the bodies that have recognised their excellence – a significant achievement given that, in very recent memory, the school was placed in “special measures” (2013). Just three years later, this same school received national recognition for progress, placing them in the top 14 per cent of schools nationally – a remarkable feat for such a short space of time. Never has there been a better time for pupils to join Etone College on its journey of progression, something that Ian Smith, head teacher, who joined the school at Easter 2015, describes in greater detail below.

Knowing strengths

Rapid progression requires a school to take a fresh approach – one that is incisively informed by a thorough sense of what it already does well and how it needs to improve. At Etone College, we’ve always prided ourselves on our traditional values of good manners, courtesy and respect with a “no excuses” culture. Pupils constantly reflect on their choices, how much their choices were in their control and how they might have chosen differently. This is accompanied by a keen sense of responsibility and numerous opportunities for pupils to participate and take ownership of their own learning. Our strong pastoral system has undoubtedly...
underpinned our success, and while it doesn’t always yield the same obviously measurable outcomes as other measures, it has provided the foundations on which we have been able to build.

High-quality pedagogy now pervades the school, with a strong emphasis placed on measurable outcomes, set in a culture where only the best is good enough. In practice, this means highly effective teaching and learning, rigorously planned quality assurance and the regular and diagnostic use of pupil data. By measuring and evaluating our outcomes and through high-quality professional dialogue and CPD, we are able to inform our next stage of planning and facilitate recursive improvements year on year. The “devil is in the detail” – looking closely not only to ensure that the basics are in place and completed to a minimum expected standard but that we are also constantly improving all aspects of our practice.

Aspirations for and expectations of our pupils are very high and we work continually to ensure that pupils share the same sense of belief in their own abilities. We look to provide them with opportunity – wanting to be the means by which they realise their ambitions and potential. Rewards, closely aligned to progress and participation, and the strong pastoral system, have been pivotal to this success, as have links to external providers such as universities, which all constantly encourage our pupils to aim high.

Curriculum relevance and clear progression pathways are also key to engagement and therefore success. Our curriculum rationale is simple: based around clearly transferable employability skills that allow our pupils to make progress within school and be equipped for their appropriate next steps. We celebrate the successes of our pupils, with regular, high-profile events now the norm. At the heart of everything we do is a belief that we will provide the highest possible level of education provision while meeting the specific needs of our community – a local school to meet the needs of local people.

Maintaining a close point of contact with parents, our feeder schools and the community have also been central to our improvement, and we now enjoy a much better reputation in the local area as a result. We recognise the crucial role that parents and carers have had in our success – playing greater roles in their children’s progress and achievements. We are now the first choice of many – moving from a rapidly falling roll to admission numbers that have doubled, now being the highest they have ever been.

Improvement

A key strength is also positive contributions from all stakeholders: “everybody benefits because everybody contributes”. We’ve been able to transform learning and outcomes for our pupils because of the real team ethos running through our school – teaching and non-teaching staff alike – whose common purpose is to improve experiences and outcomes for pupils. Our staff work hard to
secure improvement for pupils and we, in return, work hard to secure improvements for staff.

One aspect of this is CPD with a recognition that staff at different stages of their career have different needs. These efforts ensure that our teachers have the necessary skills to improve learning. Ultimately, we want our staff to have the opportunities to grow and improve. Part and parcel of this process is the chance for us to recognise strong practitioners and elevate them in terms of leadership. This fits with our school strapline of “progress for all” – a statement to which we have a very real and genuine commitment.

Although we’ve undergone enormous improvement, there are still challenges. Curriculum change is often rapid, often providing insufficient time for schools to adapt. Teacher recruitment is also difficult, particularly in certain subjects, and while we have successfully engaged with Evolve Teaching School SCITT programmes to “grow our own”, we are acutely aware of the uncertainty that surrounds teacher recruitment both now and in the future.

The future

We see collaboration as key to our future success, and are proud to be part of the Matrix Academy Trust. As such, we have been afforded opportunities to share and learn best practice. We enjoy the status of being part of the seventh highest performing academy chain in the country. Collaboration is an area we’d like to grow, not least by establishing links within Nuneaton – only good things can come from partnerships with other schools. We’ve already worked hard to re-establish curriculum links with our primary feeder schools, and developing further links with other schools would be particularly helpful, particularly as we would all be familiar with challenges specific to our region.

Looking to the future, we want to continue our successful journey. Complacency does not exist at Etone. At the risk of tempting fate, we constantly strive to be an Ofsted “outstanding” school. Until then, we plan to expand our work with other schools, utilise the forthcoming new build and further increase our numbers while never losing our focus on traditional values and progress. We want to be known as a leading school in our area that meets the needs of the pupils, the parents and the broader community. More than that though, we want to be the school where there is truly “progress for all”.

“We enjoy the status of being in the top ten for the highest performing academies nationally”

Year 11 prom, class of 2018
Based in Sutton Coldfield, Fairfax Academy is a large mixed comprehensive with a strong commitment to performing arts. The academy’s values are built around hard work and opportunity, with the belief that every child attending Fairfax should have the chance to thrive in an atmosphere where high expectations meet endless possibilities. Deborah Bunn, head of academy, talks about the “Fairfax experience”.

“Sinceritas Laboris” has been our school motto since Fairfax was founded in 1959. The culture of building character in our students begins with this belief that there is dignity in hard work. Our aim is to ensure that every student leaves the school proud of the person that they are and of taking personal responsibility in delivering excellence in everything they do. We believe our students mature into confident, resilient, ambitious young people.

A traditional school in a modern context

At the heart of our school is our traditional house system, established when the school was founded. It is a cornerstone of the school, ensuring our students experience a well-rounded creative curriculum alongside their academic studies. Participation and opportunity are the foundations upon which our school was built, and have remained the dominant features in our academy’s offer through its six head teachers. Our four houses Coventry, Kenilworth, Stratford and Warwick provide each student and staff member with a sense of identity.
Whereas most school calendars are punctuated with exam series, mock examinations and study leave, the calendar at Fairfax revolves around our house events, the largest being our annual Eisteddfod taking place in December.

Each year our four houses compete rigorously to become champions in a range of activities. Our house athletics tournament, house sporting fixtures and annual swimming gala develop our students’ sportsmanship and positive attitudes to healthy lifestyles.

Our annual charity week encourages students to think creatively in order to raise money for their chosen charity while reflecting on the value of charitable giving. The highlight of any academic year here at Fairfax is our performing arts festival, our Eisteddfod. On the two final nights of our December term, the four houses compete in choir, vocal group, spoken word, instrumental dance and drama, backed up by their house individual entries in art, writing and modelling to see who will be added to the Eisteddfod champions board that dates back to the first Eisteddfod in 1959.

Alongside our house calendar, Fairfax offers students a wealth of other opportunities through high-performing sports teams, the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme, dance evenings, music evenings, The Shakespeare Schools Festival and our bi-annual school productions.

Commitment to the performing arts

While shrinking educational budgets have forced other establishments to trim their performing arts offer, Fairfax cemented its dedication to the arts in 2015 when we offered our first 25 places for year 7 students demonstrating aptitude for performing arts. Students from all around the region can apply for these places each September, allowing students who would not usually be allocated Fairfax as a secondary school to join the academy and take advantage of all it has to offer.

While our house system is at the heart of our school, we are also a high-performing secondary school in terms of student outcomes. Alongside our outstanding extracurricular offer, Fairfax runs a rigorous traditional academic curriculum to equip our students for the next stages of their education, employment or training.

Our timetabled academic curriculum comprises a broad, balanced two-year Key Stage 3, alongside a three-year Key Stage 4. The rationale for committing three years to Key Stage 4 is that the rigour of our curriculum means that by studying for this length of time, students have opportunity to master the content, which optimises their chance of success in a range of subjects that enable them to progress onward to a wealth of education, employment and training opportunities.

A rigorous curriculum for all

In Key Stage 3, all students get to study and experience their subject, while developing a thirst for learning in it. Our year 7 catch-up premium

“The culture of building character in our students begins with the belief that there is dignity in hard work”
and a section of the pupil premium budget are invested in an Accelerated Progress Department where vulnerable young people receive the same offer, delivered with a focus on developing core skills.

At Key Stage 4, all students study maths, English language and literature, religious studies and physical education, along with either geography or history. The majority of students study a modern foreign language, as we believe the rigour of these subjects offers challenge as well as a highly respected qualification for the competitive modern workforce. Students have two free option choices from a broad range of GCSE subjects with vocational options available. These options allow our students to study a course suited to them and maximises their chance of success. All students complete two GCSEs in science, with around 50 per cent completing the single sciences. We believe that by studying GCSE science, rather than a vocational alternative, students have greater opportunities for career choices in their future.

A wealth of opportunity

At post-16, our students choose from a breadth of subjects that run alongside enrichment activities. We aim to further develop the skill-set of our sixth form students, to both expand their experiences and prepare them for the next steps. We encourage opportunities in leadership through: our senior prefect team; motivation as house captains; collaboration through direct entry to the Gold Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme; teamwork through our sporting opportunities; and, of course, participation through taking lead roles in our Eisteddfod.

Our curriculum offers students opportunity to thrive both academically and personally, allowing young people to leave us with a portfolio of qualifications that equip them for their place in modern society. Our Progress 8 score of 0.29 this year categorised our school as above average and illustrates perfectly that students attending Fairfax leave with great outcomes as well as a wealth of experiences.

As the founding school in Fairfax multi-academy trust, leaders and teachers at our academy have considered it a privilege to work alongside their counterparts in our family of schools. We look forward to seeing the culture of participation and opportunity grow across the trust as performing arts and sports take on an increased salience.

Next year, 2019, marks Fairfax Academy’s 60th anniversary. We look forward to celebrating with our students not only all that we have achieved to date, but also the promising future ahead of us.
Holy Trinity Catholic School

Holy Trinity Catholic School is in Small Heath, Birmingham. The school is a mixed comprehensive with 624 pupils on the roll, and is hugely diverse in terms of its religious and cultural intake, with the majority of pupils being Muslim. The school’s integration of pupils from different “religions backgrounds” and those from none is a unique and wonderful feature of the school. Some of the problems the school deals with are high levels of deprivation, child sexual exploitation and mental health issues. Many of its pupils have language needs, some classed as severe. When the new head teacher Colin Crehan arrived, he worked with all stakeholders to take the school forward – his description of which follows.

Improvement

This sense of flux and uncertainty that existed within the school would appear to have reflected the national education picture. A great challenge for Holy Trinity and that of all schools is the constant change of policy implemented in brisk time frames. While some of them have improved schools, it’s incredible that huge philosophical and mechanical changes within curriculum, assessment and performance measures have happened simultaneously. It’s remarkable that there have been 16 education ministers in the last 30 years. On average, this equates to an elected representative in post for less than two years. No time is given for schools to reflect or to breathe, with initiatives not reaching their maximum potential as a result. More importantly, pupils are not reaching their maximum potential as a result.
“Learn to love and love to learn” – this is the motto we have sought to make reality. Concerned by falling pupil numbers, we immediately reviewed existing admission protocols. Consequently, 64 additional pupils were welcomed into the school during the previous academic year. This will result in an improving financial position. Vacancies in science, humanities and English were filled with quality specialists. Holy Trinity started this academic year with specialist practitioners in all areas – all of which requires much work.

Behaviour

In reflecting upon what caused our significant improvement, it is important to highlight our Catholic ethos. In conjunction with the Gospel values of Jesus Christ, the school has a mantra to “treat pupils like they are your own”. All school decisions are informed by the principle that if it is not good enough for your own children then it is not good enough for the pupils in Holy Trinity. All staff are committed to these principles of unconditional love, irrespective of difference; everybody is an equal in the school.

The school has an inclusive approach to managing behaviour and attendance. A dedicated team of professionals support behaviour through a tutor system, consistent application of the consequence system and positive behaviour for learning points leading to additional reward. Fixed-term exclusion figures have reduced significantly in recent years; indeed better than national. The “Behaviour Team” is supported by a committed pastoral team who support the attendance and well-being of pupils. Pupils are given opportunities to reflect upon any poor behaviour with workshops running alongside school sanctions to support those at risk of school refusal or exclusion.

Significant improvements in teaching, learning and assessment meant that the school enjoyed some immediate successes in GCSE 2017 results. Improved pupil performance occurred in nine different subject areas including English, maths and RE. The school has a vibrant CPD programme, with weekly “top tips” for improved teaching and learning being a regular developmental feature here. The quality of middle leadership is strong within the school, with all joining senior leaders part of an extended leadership team to regularly reflect and plan. Middle and senior leaders have worked together to establish systems of analysing data, leading to rapid progress among all year groups. Teachers are skilfully adept in using data to inform planning and intervention both within the classroom and outside. Due to consistent application of quality assurance systems and strong leadership at all levels, further improvements are expected.

Curriculum breadth

The school’s curriculum is broad, balanced and innovative, underpinned by the “5Rs”: resilience, responsibility, resourcefulness, readiness, and reflectiveness. To respond to the challenges posed by a lack of aspiration among some pupils, the school has moved to a different way of setting and banding. School improvement partners and Ofsted have commended the school for developing a system that does not cap performance through its structural organisation.

Pupils are no longer labelled in a hierarchical system which stigmatises and leaves behind the least able. Mixed-ability teaching within the system has improved rates of progress.
and led to a significant reduction in low-level disruption within the classroom. The school has developed strong practices in supporting a large number of EAL pupils. A custom transition programme supports pupils who are newly arrived in the country. An “access” provision with a separate and tailored curriculum, running alongside the mainstream curriculum, is available to support those with the highest levels of need. This is further supported by a dedicated specialist team of EAL and SEND support. Integration to mainstream curriculum for them is the aspiration, but decisions are individual, with pupils given the time needed to flourish.

Reading is an essential part of our curriculum. Two external online providers are used to support pupil progress in reading. Pupils read in tutor time, assembly and across a range of lessons with further initiatives such as “DEEP days” or special days like World Book Day. Most recently, the latter saw teachers dress up as characters from famous books to further ignite a passion among our pupils. Pupil premium and catch-up funding is used to ensure that our wonderful library is plentifully stocked. Ofsted spoke praiseingly in 2017 about our library resources and further commented that “many are becoming prolific and avid readers”.

The curriculum is reviewed annually with decisions on KS4 choices dependent upon the needs of individuals and that of the cohort. Pupils can choose from traditional and academic EBacc subjects, but they also have access to a rich array of other subjects/courses in areas such as the arts and social communication. The school’s curriculum is supported by a rapidly improving extracurricular programme. Year 8 pupils, for example, have recently taken a leading role in performing at a Citizens UK General Assembly in Birmingham in preparation for the Commonwealth Games in 2022.

All schools face great challenges, which makes work difficult but also extremely rewarding when positive impacts are evident. The school was rated “good” by Ofsted in all categories in December 2017. The challenge now is to maintain improvements and further push forward in pursuit of providing a world-class education for our pupils.

“The curriculum for safeguarding is comprehensive. It takes into consideration risks that are particular to the local area. The well-informed pupils are and feel safe”

Ofsted, December 2017
CURRENT HEAD TEACHER

Head teacher Alan Jasper first joined Ellowes Hall at the turn of the millennium. He became deputy head teacher in 2005 when the school’s transformation under previous head teacher Andy Griffiths began. At the start of 2015, Alan was appointed head teacher, and Ellowes Hall became the lead academy of the newly established Invictus Multi Academy Trust (led by Andy Griffiths as executive head teacher). Both Ellowes Hall and Invictus have gone from strength to strength, the latter expanding to six academies by September 2018.

Traditional values and an independent-minded education

Our mission statement has been unchanged since 2005 and consists of the 4 As: aspiration, achievement, providing an all-round education for all; it has the high expectations of its stakeholders running through it. We unashamedly aim to provide an “independent school” education in a comprehensive secondary school at the heart of the Black Country in Lower Gornal, Dudley. Our values are very traditional in that we expect high standards of work, behaviour, uniform and conduct, and a commitment to engaging in learning and all that the school has to offer.

In return we aim to provide the highest quality of learning in a caring environment in which every student has the opportunity to shine. We also offer a multitude of extracurricular experiences ranging from our own Army Cadet Force to staging West End-style theatrical productions, sports (including sailing at Himley Lake), Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, charity work, robot wars and public speaking competitions. We have found that the more students engage in the extracurricular activities, the more they go on to succeed academically.
Academic and vocational pathways

Although we have 10 per cent admission by sporting aptitude on entry in year 7, we have a truly comprehensive intake, predominantly from students within a mile of Ellowes Hall. We have been heavily oversubscribed in the past six years and have taken well in excess of our PAN in order to ensure we can still be the school of choice for local parents. In order to cater for the complete academic spectrum of abilities in years 7 and 8, we have “grammar stream” classes for the most able as well as “boost” classes for those who initially find academic work the most challenging. All students study art, music, performing arts (drama & dance), food and design in addition to the core subjects (English, mathematics, science, history, geography, RE and PE) right up until the end of year 8, with the vast majority (over 90 per cent) studying a modern foreign language. At the start of year 9, around 80 per cent of students will follow an academic (EBacc) pathway continuing their MFL course, with the remaining 20 per cent increasing their English and mathematics (with a modern foreign language) but following one of our successful vocational courses. However, it is very important to us that the GCSE “arts” subjects are still available to every student to be able to study should they wish.

Prep

We had previously “dabbled” with providing extra lessons after school for year 11 in their final two terms but four years ago we decided we needed to establish a culture of independent learning outside of normal lesson time for more students. We now have 40 minutes of prep time three days a week for 30 weeks a year for all year 10 and year 11 students, with students in Key Stage 3 directed to attend focused prep sessions as and when they need them and in addition to the extracurricular and homework clubs that are available at these times. Students appreciate the value of prep and the difference it makes to their overall progress and attainment.

Sports facilities

Even though we became a specialist sports college in 2004 and we had an outstanding PE department, our sporting facilities were quite frankly woeful. We were awarded a Sport England grant and support from the LA but this was not enough to provide us and, more importantly, our local community with the very best. With the provision of a sizeable

“ It is very important to us that the GCSE “arts” subjects are still available to every student”
five-year loan and the support of local councillors, we gained planning permission for a double-sized sports hall and floodlit Astroturf pitches. We now admit 10 per cent of new year 7 students by sporting aptitude, and we have an “alpha” group of elite sportswomen and men who receive a specialist programme in appropriate surroundings.

Performing arts

Our annual theatrical productions each November literally showcase the talents of our students. Over 100 students and staff begin work on the production each April and the outcomes are magical and extraordinary. Last year’s production of *Billy Elliot* was seen by over 1,400 paying customers. The shows are of a West End scale in terms of the performances, music and its production values.

Student leadership and house competitions

We firmly believe that giving students leadership opportunities contributes greatly to their personal development and their ability to become well-rounded individuals and contribute to society as they become young adults. The school has a team of senior prefects (head girl, head boy, sports captains, and their deputies) who are appointed following a rigorous interview process towards the end of year 10. We have an elected school council as well as a team of anti-bullying ambassadors. We have four houses (Clent, Enville, Himley and Kinver) and a very competitive inter-house competition with each having junior and senior house captains.

Army Cadet Force

We had always offered great opportunities for those with a passion for sports and for the arts, but we felt that there was a missing piece in the extracurricular “jigsaw”. Having forged links with the local commander, we successfully managed to launch our own ACF having converted old changing rooms into their bespoke ward rooms. The CO and his sergeant are employed during the day as cover supervisors and so are an integral part of our school. The force has gone from strength to strength and we now have our own high ropes course in the school’s extensive grounds, which was partly funded by the ACF and the MoD.

Throughout our success story, but particularly in those times when we felt resistance from external sources, the support of our member of parliament Ian Austin has been invaluable, and he continues to be a tremendous advocate for Ellowes Hall Sports College.
Selly Park Girls’ School provides an outstanding education to its pupils. Despite 60 per cent of pupils receiving the pupil premium and 76 per cent having English as an additional language, the school continues to thrive. As well as Ofsted designating it an “outstanding school”, achievement and progress are at consistently high levels. The school is proud of its history and its beautiful, ornate Victorian buildings, which are complemented by recently built modern, state-of-the-art facilities. Lisa Darwood, head teacher, discusses the school’s vision and the challenges it faces, the successes pioneered using pupil premium, the school’s international links, and its strategic plans.

Introduction
On behalf of the students, staff and governors, I would like to welcome you to Selly Park Girls’ School. Our school is known for its high expectations, academic success, first-class education and its innovative approach. Our vision and values underpin all that we do. Indeed, everyone who knows us or visits our school speaks of our distinct ethos. Our core belief is that the most effective education is when teachers and parents work together in a genuine partnership, which results in our students being proud of their personal achievements. Our hard-working students are imbued with a sense of purpose and determination and boast some of the best progress rates in the city, despite hailing from some of the most disadvantaged wards in Birmingham.

“...Our students become upwardly mobile after feeling empowered by the education they receive...”
Vision

The success of Selly Park Girls’ School is built on four key pillars: inspirational teachers, aspirational pupils, engaged stakeholders and a vibrant environment. Our forward-thinking governors work closely with our dynamic senior leadership team and focus on consistently improving outcomes for all pupils – we are uncompromising in our ambition. Our inspiring teachers are complemented by our support staff in helping our pupils to achieve the highest grades and make excellent progress. Being a relatively small secondary school benefits our pupils: we know them individually, their strengths and areas for development, and this results in the provision of our highly effective programme of interventions and targeted support with which pupils actively engage.

Living out our aims to help the disadvantaged and increase social mobility

Selly Park is a microcosm of multicultural Birmingham and we are proud of our diverse student population. Many ethnic groups attend the school and enjoy harmonious relationships. Initiatives such as Unicef’s Rights Respecting embed the notion that children are valued and can thrive in a safe and protective environment. Attainment and progress for the disadvantaged is well above the national average. Our students become upwardly mobile after feeling empowered by the secondary education they receive.

Winners of Pupil Premium Award

It is no surprise that we were the winners of the coveted SSAT Pupil Premium Award for the Midlands (2014, 2015, 2016 and 2017). Not only was the high attainment and exceptional progress applauded, but the excellent range of opportunities afforded to disadvantaged students was also remarked upon. In July 2018, we were also awarded ‘Secondary School of the Year’ at the Education Awards, the award identifies and celebrates establishments, people and organisations that go above and beyond to promote excellence within the education System. We ensure students have the crucial life skills that allow them to be global citizens. In addition, the school runs a very well-attended Saturday school which supports Key Stage 4 students in their quest for success.
An exciting and expansive curriculum

In supportive but robust departmental reviews, heads of department are coached and encouraged to provide an outstanding curriculum for our students. At Selly Park, we believe that the curriculum should be challenging and rigorous, but also rich in depth and breadth and ultimately enjoyable. Whereas some schools are narrowing their curriculum, I am proud to report that nearly two-thirds of our Key Stage 4 students are entered for the English Baccalaureate, enjoying languages as diverse as Urdu, Arabic and Russian. We are also committed to offering an exciting extracurricular programme. Recent excursions include art trips to the Oxford galleries, the Equality and Diversity residential trip to our national link school in the Lake District as well as various trips to theatres and museums. The music department also works in partnership with the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire and we provide free music tuition for all our pupils. The history department marked the recent centenary of the school by viewing rare primary sources in the form of the school diaries and letters written first-hand. As well as Science Club, which is run with the help of STEM ambassadors from the University of Birmingham, the school is also linked with the Brilliant Club at the University of Warwick.

International links

I am perhaps most proud of our international links and we are recipients of the International School Award. We are also an Expert Centre for the Global Learning Programme. We remain determined to be outward looking and retain a global dimension. We give pupils the opportunities to develop an appreciation of the diversity and richness of worldwide cultures, so they become global citizens and can thrive in an ever-changing world through their appreciation of meaningful links with schools locally, nationally and internationally. Together, the school has enjoyed visits to a wide range of places across the four corners of the globe and we have visited our long-established links with schools in Ghana and Zimbabwe this year. Personally, I have taken pupils to South Africa where they have delivered at the IAPESGW World Congress Meeting on the topic “Muslim girls’ participation in physical activity”. Over the last few years, we have hosted international dignitaries. Moreover, we have an International Staff and Pupil Council, which ensures that the global dimension is truly embedded in our curriculum.

The future of Selly Park

We have plans to expand the school’s roll over the next five years in a sensitive and sustainable fashion. We are intent on retaining the benefits of a small school as it allows us to prioritise the individual needs of our students. We will continue to have high aspirations and expectations for all our pupils and aim to develop not only their academic success but also relationships, which are characterised by kindness, tolerance, helpfulness and respect. Our doors are always open, and we would be proud to share our success story to any interested visitors.

“Selly Park is a microcosm of multicultural Birmingham”
In September 2015, Telford Park and Telford Langley opened their doors as rebranded and remodelled schools with a new sponsor and a degree of collaboration rarely seen in secondary education. Both schools, however, would retain their own unique identities; shared leadership, shared values and shared systems would underpin the rapid school improvement that was to follow. The legacy of the predecessor schools included Ofsted judgments of “special measures”, falling rolls and a declining trend for GCSE results. Three years on, however, both schools can celebrate the removal of special measures, with a judgement of “good” for leadership, transformed cultures and record results for year 11. Executive head teacher Steve Carter explains how this has been attained.

This transformation has been achieved as the result of an incredibly hard-working and committed staff, extremely supportive school communities and sponsorship from an academy trust with genuine expertise in securing rapid school improvement.

The new sponsor

Sometime before the relaunch of our two schools, the DfE’s preferred new sponsor, the Community Academies Trust (CAT), was introduced to existing leadership teams. The CAT quickly began to build a relationship with school leaders and offered professional support and advice prior to the predecessor schools formally joining the trust. As this relationship grew, the schools began to benefit from the expertise within the trust to help ensure a smooth transition to our new sponsor.
Restructure for success

The outgoing Telford Cooperative Multi Academy Trust (TCMAT) had already begun a complete staff restructure. With the growing relationship with our new sponsor in hand, however, the CAT was able to take over the lead role in this transformation, coining the phrase “restructure for success”. For our schools, this facilitated a new leadership and staffing structure and a selection process that put the right people into the right roles. Four schools were to become three, and staff from across the trust were invited to apply for posts in the new structure. Two of the new schools, Park and Langley, adopted a model of shared leadership that would be instrumental in our shared improvement journey.

I was appointed as executive head teacher, overseeing strategy and progress across both schools while retaining responsibility for operational leadership at Langley. A talented team of senior and middle leaders were recruited to operate across both schools, remaining equally accountable for both. Another key appointment was Holly Rigby as the head of school at Park, who would be a vital part of the wider strategic leadership team; she would, however, also be the figurehead and key leader when it came to the day-to-day operational responsibility at Telford Park School.

Shared leadership – best in one to be best in both

Prior to the opening of our schools we established a commitment: whatever was best in one school would become best in both. There have been many factors that have contributed to our school’s improvements, but this principle has appeared to accelerate our progress as each school benefited from lessons learnt at the other.

» V I S I O N & V A L U E S

Our approach is based on a fundamental belief that all young people have talent and the potential to achieve more than they ever thought possible. Achievement in three main areas:

» Academic: Excellent standards and outstanding progress are a prerequisite for success in life equipping young people with the skills and knowledge they will need to be successful, happy and productive citizens.

» Social: Excellent relationships for learning are a prerequisite for all other achievements. Relationships that engender mutual respect between young people, and all other members of our academies’ communities will ensure learning can be fun in a disciplined and caring environment where the highest expectations are the norm.

» Personal: All young people achieve things they can be proud of every day in addition to academic success and outside our school’s planned curriculum. We have a vital role in ensuring individuals develop their own talents and interests and have a responsibility to instil in them a sense of pride in who they are and what they achieve.

A crucial aspect was to agree a shared vision and set of values with key leaders across the new trust.

We adopted the motto “Ensuring Excellence”; this phrase was to underpin every aspect of our work. A collaboratively produced “Ensuring Excellence” document described every detail of what our schools would look like when excellence in all areas of school life was achieved. Central to our ethos has been the development of positive and productive relationships at all levels to secure a communal purpose across both school communities. It is this

“Students have embraced a culture of hard work and achievement”
Our schools have the highest expectations for academic, social and personal achievement

“The Parliamentarian Review
Highlighting best practice

We have a passion to ensure that every student has the best possible education, day-in, day-out, lesson-in, lesson-out”

“Ensuring Excellence” document that we continue to measure ourselves by.

In September 2015, underpinned by these values, our schools launched with a shared:

» School day
» Reward system
» Behaviour management system
» Staff performance management system
» Curriculum model
» Teaching & learning model
» House system

Extensive continuous professional development (CPD) co-ordinated across both of our schools ensures that leaders at all levels are fully equipped to deliver the agreed systems and strategies. Our CPD provision has also been designed to provide all staff with specialised programmes to facilitate individual development, supporting our organisational goals. A team of reflective practitioners has emerged, practitioners who strive for professional development and improvement.

Our shared leadership extends to governance. The CAT education advisory board has facilitated the establishment of a single local governing body across both schools, which is now held to account regularly by a “hub” body representing the trust.

An excellent example of the impact of our collaborative practices has been seen in our work to raise literacy levels. Leaders have worked together, for example, to devise a programme of corrective and accelerated reading. As each school subsequently found ways to refine and improve the programme, the information was shared, discussed and then transformed into a consistent strategy across both schools, with stunning results. 83 per cent of students in Key Stage 3 across both schools averaged increases in their reading age of at least 19 months within a single school year, and these improvements have clearly supported pupil engagement and achievement across the full range of subject areas we offer.

World-class basics

As our schools have developed, “Ensuring Excellence” has translated into a relentless commitment to achieve world-class basics. We have a passion to ensure that every student has the best possible education, day-in, day-out, lesson-in, lesson-out. Along the way, our schools have seen the removal of “special measures”, judgements of “good” for leadership, nationally recognised improvements in student’s literacy and outcomes that continue to improve year-on-year.

Our “Ensuring Excellence” document details the highest possible expectations and most exacting standards for any school. We will be relentless in our efforts to move our schools ever closer to this measure and look forward to every student achieving more than they ever dreamed possible in terms of their academic, social and personal attainment.
On Sunday, July 8, Britain was awash with sunshine and optimism. England football fans were preparing for their first world cup semi-final in nearly thirty years, while some Scots were hurriedly buying the chequered shirts and flags of England’s opponents, Croatia. And the weather, the hottest summer since the seventies, was keeping everyone in good spirits. In other words, it was the perfect time for a political crisis.

While Gareth Southgate’s team spent their Saturday doing battle with Sweden, Theresa May’s spent theirs battling each other. Late on Sunday evening, after another day of disagreements, the results of the crucial cabinet meeting at Chequers (the prime minister’s grace and favour country residence) began to materialise. The most significant of these was the resignation of David Davis as secretary of state for exiting the European Union.

Mr Davis found himself unable to support a proposal that would see the UK maintain a common rulebook with the EU for all goods. This would mean a co-operative arrangement with EU regulators and very little room for divergence.

The white paper that emerged after the Chequers summit focused on four key areas: economic partnership, security partnership, future areas of cooperation and the frameworks needed to enforce any eventual agreement. It contained details on the “facilitated customs arrangement”, whereby the UK would collect tariffs on behalf of the EU.

It called for the end of the free movement of people but laid out plans for EU citizens to come here without visas for “paid work in limited and clearly defined circumstances”. As regards benefits and social security, it advocated “reciprocal” arrangements with the EU.

A “joint institutional framework” would be established to interpret UK-EU agreements. In the UK, this would be overseen by our courts and in the EU it would be overseen by theirs. Some cases would be referred to the European Court of Justice, though it would be unable to resolve disputes between a UK and an EU court.

The white paper also confirmed that we will exit the European Union at 11 o’clock in the evening on March 29, 2019, which will be midnight central European time.

In her foreword for The Parliamentary Review, the prime minister suggests that a Brexit on these terms would mean we “take back control of our laws, money and borders.”

In his resignation letter, Mr Davis took a different stance: “In my view the inevitable consequence of the proposed policies will be to make the supposed control by Parliament illusory rather than real.”
If the Brexit secretary’s departure threw the government into a spin, it was nothing compared to what came next. On Monday afternoon, with the ink on Davis’ letter not yet dry, Boris Johnson announced that he was following suit. For two years, pundits had speculated about the imminent departures of the Brexit and foreign secretaries. Now they were both gone within 24 hours. In his letter, Mr Johnson said the prime minister was leading the UK into a “semi-Brexit” with the “status of a colony”.

Jeremy Hunt, who had just become the longest serving health secretary in history, was chosen to replace him, with culture secretary Matt Hancock moving to the Health Department. Mr Davis was replaced by Dominic Raab. Further resignations included Steve Baker, Maria Caulfield and Ben Bradley.

It was under this cloud that Gareth Southgate’s Three Lions took on, and were defeated by, Croatia. After which, from both a sporting and a political point of view, it was fair to say that England had been chastened by chequers.

If Mrs May was in need of a brief reprieve, she was unlikely to get one with Donald Trump arriving for his long-awaited UK visit. Amid huge protests, Mr Trump decided to give an interview with The Sun, in which he lambasted Mrs May’s Brexit negotiations and suggested that Boris Johnson would make “a great prime minister”. This was followed by a characteristic backtrack, where he said he would support whatever stance the “incredible” Mrs May took on Brexit.

No sooner had the president left than Mrs May was back in the bear pit of parliament. On the Monday, her customs bill faced a series of amendments from the pro-Brexit European Research Group, two of which were accepted by the government and each passed with a majority of just three votes.

The first of these called for the UK to refuse to collect duties for the EU unless member states did likewise. The second compelled us to have an independent regime for VAT. Labour MP Stephen Kinnock responded: “By capitulating to their proposals on the Customs and [the] Trade Bill she is accepting that the Chequers deal is now dead in the water.”

Two days later, Mr Johnson decided to deliver a resignation speech in the House of Commons, in which, while praising the prime minister for a number of things, he contrasted her Lancaster House speech of January 2017 with what was agreed at Chequers, speaking favourably of the former and less so of the latter.

Shortly before The Parliamentary Review went to print, Johnson’s former cabinet colleague, the trade secretary Liam Fox said he believed a “no-deal” Brexit was now odds-on. As the following articles demonstrate, parliamentary intransigence makes it incredibly difficult for agreements to be reached. With no clear majority for any one Brexit plan, a “no deal” scenario may well become a reality.

Whatever happens, it’s likely that 2019 will see an MP address parliament and compare what was agreed at Chequers with whatever is agreed, or not agreed, with Brussels on March 29 as the central European clock strikes twelve.
The meaning of the meaningful vote

The day before, peers had voted in favour of plans to give MPs a greater say – a move that David Davis, the then-Brexit secretary, warned could undermine the prime minister’s negotiating position because it seemed to foreclose the possibility of Britain walking away with no deal. Mr Davis now offered another compromise that would, he said, ensure that there would be a ministerial statement and a motion to the House of Commons in the event of no deal, but the key point was that his plan would not offer MPs a chance to instruct ministers – because the motion that would be put down would not be amendable.

But Mr Davis added that the procedural details were far less important than the expressed mood of the House of Commons in a moment of crisis, and he warned that the Lords amendment could become a mechanism for frustrating Brexit.

As part of the elaborate legislative dance, Mr Grieve had put down a new amendment. But now a compromise had been offered, he dropped it: “Having finally obtained, with a little more difficulty than I would have wished, the obvious acknowledgement of the sovereignty of this place over the executive, I am prepared to accept the government’s difficulty, support them and accept the form of amendment they want.”

The government proposal seemed to put the issue into the hands of the Speaker, who, in the event of no deal, would have to decide if a future motion would be amendable. There were attempts to ask the Speaker, John Bercow, what he would do in those circumstances, but he declined to say.

What was not clear to MPs was who was climbing down. Had Mr Grieve allowed ministers a face-saving solution,

In June, seven months on from his success in attaching a “meaningful vote amendment” to the EU (Withdrawal) Bill in the Commons, the former attorney-general Dominic Grieve was still fighting the same cause on the same bill.

In what proved to be the final round of the long parliamentary battle over the bill, MPs were considering changes made in the Lords, which included a tougher version of the meaningful vote than Mr Grieve’s original. In earlier rounds of consideration he had accepted a compromise proposal from the government, only for the consensus around it to break down when Downing Street presented an analysis of what it would mean that seemed far weaker than Mr Grieve had thought.

That in turn prompted the Lords to replace the compromise with a beefed-up version – and this was what MPs, for the second time in a week, were now considering.

The issue remained the narrow but potentially crucial question of what leverage MPs would have in the event that either parliament rejected the Brexit deal between the UK and the European Union or no deal was reached at all. Should there be a vote in the Commons to instruct ministers on what to do next?
which gave him what he wanted? Or had he flinched from rebellion and accepted a fig leaf in place of the guarantees he really sought?

Labour’s shadow Brexit secretary, Sir Keir Starmer, hoped that MPs would still vote for the Grieve amendment: “Standing back, that looks like common sense. It is unthinkable that any prime minister would seek to force through a course of action that would have significant consequences for many years which the majority in [the House of Commons] did not approve of… the idea that that is how we would achieve an orderly Brexit is for the birds.”

In the end, six Conservatives voted for the Grieve amendment, while four Labour MPs defied their party whip and voted with the government. And later that evening, peers accepted the bill – which allowed it to become law.

Parliament approves a third runway at Heathrow airport

Fifty years after the Wilson government set up the Roskill Commission to examine options for London airport expansion, MPs backed a planning document that endorsed a third runway for Heathrow with a resounding majority: 415 votes to 119.

The decision to endorse a national policy statement (NPS) for airports, which supported a third runway, followed an intense 90-minute debate. The result was not really in doubt – Conservative MPs were on a three-line whip, which meant that they were ordered to back the NPS, while Labour MPs, reflecting the considerable differences of view in their party, were given a free vote.

Transport secretary Chris Grayling laid out his case: “All five of London’s main airports will be full by the mid-2030s, and Heathrow is full today. We are seeing business leave the UK and go to airports like Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Paris, which have made additional capacity provision... We are losing those connections to other countries, and we are losing the investment that goes around those connections.”

He promised that there would be tough environmental conditions: the runway would not be allowed to open if it failed to meet air quality standards.

There would be a generous £2.6 billion compensation package for people displaced by the new runway, plus a noise insulation programme for homes and schools.

But there was considerable resistance. Labour’s shadow transport secretary, Andy McDonald, warned that the Heathrow expansion would “generate many winners, not least the shareholders of Heathrow Airport Ltd, but it risks making losers of many, including the communities in which thousands of people will lose hundreds of homes.” He was interrupted by a Labour colleague, John Spellar, who said that, globally, aviation would grow anyway – the question was whether Britain would share in that growth.
When former Labour culture secretary Tessa Jowell was diagnosed with a brain tumour, she launched a personal campaign to highlight the need for better cancer treatment. The result was two emotional debates in the Lords and the Commons, with speeches from her many friends in both houses.

The Commons debate was opened by Labour MP Sarah Jones, who was part of the team working for Lady Jowell on the bid to hold the 2012 Olympics in London. Lady Jowell watched with her family in the under-gallery of the Commons.

There was praise for Lady Jowell from the then health secretary, Jeremy Hunt, who said that she left two great legacies and – unusually – the Speaker, John Bercow, intervened from the chair: “As somebody who is living with cancer you have shone a light on a cruel curse and the need for collaborative, resourced and unflagging devotion to the effort to tackle that curse. [Sarah Jones] said that you loved this place. I hope that it is blindingly obvious to you, Tessa, that we love you.” In her seat in the gallery, Lady Jowell was visibly moved. She died a few weeks later, on May 18, 2018.

The government was accused of failing to tackle the problems at the public sector mega-contractor Carillion as the company headed for collapse. The chair of the Commons’ powerful financial watchdog, the public accounts committee, Labour’s Meg Hillier, told MPs that a confidential risk assessment of the company had shown rising concern about the finances of the company, which provided key public services, including school maintenance and prison management.
The collapse cost thousands of jobs and left the government to pick up those functions. The government’s risk assessments were released to the public accounts committee and, after holding hearings on them, Meg Hillier delivered a statement giving her committee’s verdict.

“The Carillion papers identify clear and compelling problems with the business in the months leading to its collapse,” she told the House. “…although Carillion had been rated as ‘amber’, owing to its performance against contracts with the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice, it was not until after Carillion issued a profit warning in July last year that the government downgraded it to ‘red’. It therefore appears that the government was not aware of Carillion’s financial distress until that point. In November last year, officials recommended a provisional ‘black’ rating for Carillion – that information has come directly from the papers that we have published

– but following representations from the company, the Cabinet Office did not confirm that designation. Carillion collapsed less than two months later.”

The committee now planned to hold more hearings on the relationship between the government and strategic suppliers because, she said, some big contractors were now “too big to fail”. Carillion itself had continued to believe that it would receive a government bailout right up to the moment of collapse in January.

Legalising abortion in Northern Ireland

The referendum vote of the Irish Republic in June to liberalise its abortion laws produced immediate Commons pressure for a similar change in Northern Ireland, where abortions are only permitted if the woman’s life or health is at risk.

But the issue was fraught with political and constitutional difficulties for Theresa May’s government. First, the Northern Ireland Assembly, which is responsible for justice there, had been suspended since 2017 because of a breakdown of trust between its main parties. Second, the Conservatives depended on the support of the ten Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MPs for their precarious Commons majority – and the DUP did not want a change in the law.

Against that, when the Labour MP Stella Creasy sought an emergency debate on the issue, she was supported across the House, including by most Conservative MPs. The result was an emotional debate containing some very personal speeches. Stella Creasy proposed a precise legal change to the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act: the law that is the basis of the abortion ban.

The DUP’s Emma Little-Pengelly retorted that what was being proposed would create “one of the most liberal abortion regimes anywhere in the world” in Northern Ireland – and she said any such decision should be for the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Another DUP MP, Sammy Wilson, insisted that the legislation in Northern Ireland was balanced because it protected the rights of both the woman and the unborn child, adding: “100,000 people are alive in Northern Ireland today who would otherwise have been killed before they were even born.”
Northern Ireland secretary Karen Bradley said that she personally supported reform, but that “abortion has been a devolved matter in Northern Ireland since 1921, and it would not be appropriate for Westminster to seek to impose its will or to be the arbiter of an issue that has long been devolved”.

And Labour MP Jess Phillips said that having had an abortion did not make her or other women criminals. And she quoted the experiences of some Northern Irish women: “It was Christmas Eve. I was with friends at a party and stepped outside for a breath of air and I was raped… My mum had to book flights and booked me into a clinic. This all took money and I was from a working-class family. We borrowed what we could and I left for London. Alone after I’d been raped. I’d never travelled anywhere on my own.”

At the end of the debate, MPs backed Stella Creasy’s call for change, but the vote will not be binding on the government. It was clear, however, that pressure was building for the UK parliament to act if the politicians of northern Ireland did not.

In March, the prime minister issued a grave warning to the Russian government after a double agent and his daughter, now resident in Britain, were poisoned with a military-grade nerve agent at their home in Salisbury.

Sergei Skripal, a Russian defector to Britain, and his daughter Yulia were exposed to novichok, a nerve agent developed by Russia. Theresa May gave Russia 24 hours to provide answers about the incident or face sanctions from Britain.

In a statement to the Commons, the prime minister praised the professionalism of the emergency services and armed forces in responding to the incident. She said that the chemical had been identified by “world-leading” experts at the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory at Porton Down and that, given the Russian government’s record of state-sponsored assassinations, ministers had concluded that it was “highly likely” that Russia was responsible.

“There are, therefore, only two plausible explanations for what happened in Salisbury on March 4,” she added. “Either this was a direct act by the Russian state against our country or the Russian government lost control of its potentially catastrophically damaging nerve agent and allowed it to get into the hands of others.”

Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said that the events in Salisbury were “shocking” but added a cautious note: “We need to see both the evidence and a full account from the Russian authorities in the light of the emerging evidence to which the prime minister referred… we need to continue seeking a robust dialogue with Russia on all the issues – both domestic and international – currently dividing our countries, rather than simply cutting off contact and letting the tensions and divisions get worse and, potentially, even more dangerous.”

He also called on the prime minister to toughen up the Sanctions and...
Mr Corbyn’s response produced a stream of criticism from the Labour MPs behind him. One, John Woodcock, said that UK national security would be at risk if the country were led by anyone who did not understand the gravity of the Russian threat.

The Scottish National Party’s Westminster leader, Ian Blackford, demanded a robust response: “firm and strong action must be taken to send a clear message to the Kremlin that we will not accept Russian interference in our democracy or in our way of life.”

In July, two additional UK citizens were poisoned with the same nerve agent. Dawn Sturgess, 44, died on Sunday 8th while Charlie Rowley, 45, was in a serious condition but was discharged on Monday 20th. Police have identified Sturgess’ perfume bottle as the container that was used to house the agent. They also believe they have identified the suspected perpetrators of the attack but, as The Parliamentary Review goes to print, no arrests have yet been made.

She did not believe that evidence on the scale available could be falsified, and she said that the Syrian regime was seeking to cover up the atrocity by searching refugees, in case they tried to smuggle out samples of the chemicals that had been used – it was clear that only President Assad’s regime had the capability to carry out such an attack.

The prime minister also defended the legality of the UK action: Russia had blocked a UN resolution to establish an independent investigation into the latest attack. She said that to argue that the UK could only act with a UN resolution was to accept a Russian veto on British foreign policy. She said that military action was justified to prevent further gas attacks – there was no alternative course of action and the attacks were necessary and proportionate.
Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn responded that the prime minister was accountable to parliament, not to the US president, and added that Britain needed a War Powers Act to transform what he called a “now broken convention” into a legal obligation.

There were angry shouts when he said that the UK action was legally questionable, and he questioned whether the government could be sure that the chemical attack was the work of the Assad regime. He called for a diplomatic solution to end the war and the refugee crisis it had caused.

Senior Conservative Kenneth Clark backed the government’s action, but he queried the lack of parliamentary debate before the event, given that President Trump had announced his intention to strike against the Assad regime well in advance.

The Scottish National Party’s Westminster leader, Ian Blackford, reminded Mrs May that she led a minority government, adding: “It was perfectly possible for House to have been recalled in advance of the Saturday morning airstrikes.”

Lib Dem leader Sir Vince Cable agreed with this and asked if there might be more airstrikes, in light of President Trump’s comment that it was “mission accomplished”.

But the prime minister would not be drawn on that.

The last word

This edition of The Parliamentary Review has overseen yet another extraordinary year in British politics. Cabinet ministers have departed, Commons debates have raged long into the night and, at times, it has felt like little has been achieved. From our standpoint, it is clear that this has not been caused by a lack of trying. The members of parliament with whom we have crossed paths, from all parties and none, have each been working incredibly hard to further what they feel is in the best interests of the constituency, and the country, they serve.

And, though the political realm has been a source of frustration for many, it is clear, as Andrew Neil observes in the opening pages of this publication, that those operating at the micro level of the British economy are not only working tirelessly, they are also achieving great things. The articles from this year’s Review representatives exemplify this.

A country is not a perfect blueprint put into action: it is the sum of millions of autonomous parts. Individuals who motivate their staff, inspire their students or simply do their job to the best standard they can muster. And, though there are always adjustments and improvements to be made, it is our conviction that British parts are in fine working order.
Acknowledgements

Senior Editors: Ross Hindle, Craig Wilmann, Rt Hon David Curry and Joshua Jackson

Journalists: Thomas Wilson, Andrew Neil, Bill Winter, Andrew Barlow, Nikolaus Cox, Mark D’Arcy, Scott Challinor, Sean Coughlan, Dave Lee, Tony Harrington, Jon Masters, Beth Stevenson and Robyn Wilson

Designers: Constantin Nimigean and Andreea Cioran

Copy-editors: Jonathan Sherrington, James Patrick Thomas, Rupert Douglas and Full Media

Photograph procurement: Jonathan White

Westminster Publications is also grateful to the following people:
Daniel Yossman, Jamie Oglesby, Lord Pickles, Lord Blankett, Rt Hon Theresa May, Rt Hon Chris Grayling, Rt Hon Damian Hinds, Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE, Rt Hon Esther McVey, Rt Hon Claire Perry, Tracey Crouch MP, Dr Tristram Hunt, Paul Everitt, Julian Davids, Professor Ted Baker, Ian Wright, Brian Berry, Adam Mansell, Chris Atkin, Liz Field, Josh Terry, Frank Lampard, Julia Hartley Brewer, Rt Hon Michael Gove, Sir Nick Clegg, William Graves, Marcin Bulka, Hannah Riding, Devina Lavji, Fern Hall and John Hammersmith

Images in this publication have been reproduced courtesy of Alamy and Flickr.