

Central Region Schools Trust – Trustee Biographies

Gareth Bower (Chair of Finance and Resources Committee)

Gareth joined the Trust in early 2023 and serves as Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee. A qualified accountant with KPMG, Gareth has held senior financial management roles across IT, telecommunications, and construction sectors. He currently works for Transport for London, overseeing the financial governance of major construction projects during a period of significant challenge.

Gareth brings extensive experience from both private and public sectors to support the Trust's financial strategy and embed best-practice processes. Outside work, Gareth enjoys cycling, countryside walks with his partner and dog, and exploring new destinations.

Nick Clifford (Chair of Education and Standards Committee)

Nick was appointed as a Trustee in January 2020 and chairs the Education and Standards Committee. His career has focused on executive education and organisational change, underpinned by doctoral research into barriers to corporate transformation using action research methodology.

Nick holds an MBA from Cambridge University and has worked extensively with Alliance Manchester Business School, designing and delivering executive education programmes.

Nick's expertise in strategic thinking and organisational development informs his contribution to the Trust, including his role in supporting the School Improvement Board. He remains committed to advancing educational excellence across all CRST schools.

Claire Grainger (Trustee)

Claire has been a headteacher since 2007 and is currently CEO of a Church of England multi-academy trust. She has led three primary schools in diverse communities and served as a Local Leader of Education and member of Devon SACRE for over a decade. Claire has chaired an Interim Executive Board for a secondary school and is passionate about coaching and mentoring leaders to drive school improvement.

Appointed as a CRST Trustee in September 2023, Claire brings expertise in leadership development, accountability, and Christian distinctiveness. Outside work, she supports her local cricket club as Safeguarding Officer and recently received the Safe Hands Award for her commitment to welfare and safeguarding.

Eric Griffiths (Vice Chair to the Trust Board and Chair of HR Committee)

Eric has served the Trust for over a decade, previously as Chair and now as Vice Chair and Chair of the HR Committee. His distinguished career includes senior leadership roles in education, notably as Chief Inspector of Schools and Executive Director for Education and Lifelong Learning in Sandwell.

Eric later established an educational consultancy, working with the Department for Education and the Baker Dearing Trust until his retirement in 2015. Eric's extensive governance and leadership experience continues to support CRST's strategic direction. He enjoys walking both in the UK and abroad and spending time with his family.

John Howard (Chair of Audit and Risk Committee)

John rejoined the CRST Board in March 2022, having previously served as a Trustee and RSA Nominated Governor. With over 40 years in education, including as a College Principal, John now runs a consultancy supporting schools and colleges with improvement planning and curriculum development. He also brings significant governance experience from his role as a Non-Executive Director in the NHS, where he chaired Audit and Remuneration Committees.

John's deep understanding of governance and risk management strengthens the Trust's oversight and assurance processes.

Orla MacSherry (Chair to the Trust Board)

Orla has been a Trustee since 2016 and was appointed Chair of the Trust Board in 2023. A debt finance lawyer by profession, Orla led the real estate finance team of a leading city law firm for over a decade and now provides consultancy services to investment banks and law firms. She brings extensive expertise in finance, governance, and strategic leadership.

Orla is passionate about social justice and the transformative power of education. Outside work, she enjoys horse riding and tennis and is a Fellow of the RSA.

Christopher Smith (Trustee)

Chris is Headteacher of South Bromsgrove High School, a single academy trust serving approximately 1,350 students in North Worcestershire. He has held the role since 2017 and brings over 25 years of experience in education, including leadership positions as Head of School, Deputy Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher, and Director of Learning.

Chris is passionate about the transformative power of education and was drawn to CRST's commitment to social justice, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a member of the Education and Standards Committee, he uses his extensive experience to support school leaders and drive improvement across the Trust.

Outside of work, Chris is a keen rugby enthusiast and enjoys mountain walking both in the UK and internationally.

Nasa Ahmed (Trustee)

Nasa joined the CRST Board in January 2025, motivated by a desire to give back to the communities served by the Trust, having attended one of its schools as a student. He brings a wealth of leadership experience from his career in the British Army, where he was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in 2016.

Specialising in Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search (EOD&S), Nasa has undertaken operational deployments to Ukraine, Iraq, and West Africa. His career has included roles as Regimental Operations Officer and Chief of Staff for a high-readiness unit, overseeing force generation and global operations. In 2024, he was awarded the King's Commendation for Valuable Service and promoted to Major. He is currently studying for a master's degree at King's College London.

Nasa's strategic leadership and operational expertise strengthen CRST's governance capacity. Outside work, he is a fitness enthusiast and avid traveller with a passion for exploring new cultures and cuisines.

Sam Harris (Trustee)

Awaiting content

Richard Davies (Trustee)

Awaiting content