

## Central Region Schools Trust – Trustee Biographies

TRUSTEE	BIOGRAPHY
<b>Gareth Bower</b> <i>Chair to Finance &amp; Resources Committee</i> 	<p>Gareth joined the Trust at the start of 2023 and Chairs the Finance and Resources Committee. Gareth qualified as an Accountant with KPMG and has since held a number of senior financial management roles in the IT, telecommunications and construction industry. He currently works for Transport for London, responsible for guiding the finances of a large number of construction projects through a very challenging few years.</p> <p>Gareth is keen to leverage his financial experience in both the private and public sector through his membership of the Committees to support the Trust and develop best -practice processes.</p> <p>Gareth lives with his partner and dog and enjoys muddy walks on the weekend, commuting to work on his bike and travelling to far flung places whenever the opportunity arises.</p>
<b>Nick Clifford</b> <i>Chair to Education &amp; Standards Committee</i> 	<p>Nick specialised in executive education and worked for a broad range of clients. His doctoral research concentrated on the barriers to corporate organisational change using ground-breaking action research methodology concentrating on 'learning through doing'. This was written up in thesis form and more recently in a chapter in a research handbook on public service change.</p> <p>In 1997 Nick was offered a sabbatical year to study full-time for an MBA at the Judge Business School at Cambridge University. On completion he briefly ran his own consultancy company designing and delivering executive education programmes but quickly developed a relationship with Alliance Manchester Business School. It led to teaching full time as a director of programme design and delivery. His doctorate research grew out of understanding the relationship between teaching and applied learning. He left full-time employment just before the pandemic retaining his relationship with AMBS and consulting with a number of organisations on managing organisational change. Nick's knowledge areas are related to strategic thinking and the advance of major organisational development and change projects and programmes.</p>

	<p>Nick was appointed as Trustee for the Central Region Schools Trust in January 2020 and has since committed wholly to the role, including the chairing of the now developed Education and Standards Committee, and more recently to the support of the School Improvement Board. Nick is a committed Trustee who brings his wealth of knowledge and experience to the benefit of the Trust and is a keen contributor.</p>
<p><b>Claire Grainger</b> <i>Education &amp; Standards Committee</i></p> 	<p>Claire Grainger has been a headteacher since 2007 and is an expert in primary educational leadership. She has led three primary schools with varied communities in rural and inner-city locations in both the South-West and West Midlands. Currently, Claire is a CEO of a small C of E MAT. Claire has been a Local Leader of Education and an active member of Devon SACRE for 13 years.</p> <p>More recently Claire was invited by the local authority to be a member of an Interim Executive Board (IEB) for a Secondary School, which involved chairing the School Improvement Committee. Claire has a passion for coaching and mentoring leaders and is currently working &amp; collaborating with other schools (outside of her own Trust) to further develop school improvement priorities, notably with developing rigorous monitoring systems, holding leaders to account and supporting school culture and ethos.</p> <p>Claire is an active advocate for CRST, having been appointed in September 2023, and is keen to be part of a governance team that makes a difference for the students in all schools. Her skillset can be used effectively to work alongside executive leaders and trustees, with a particular focus on Christian distinctiveness for the Church schools within CRST. In Claire's spare time, she enjoys supporting her children in their love for cricket and is a committee member at the local cricket club. Part of this role includes being the Safeguarding/Welfare Officer. Claire has recently received the Safe Hands Award by Worcestershire County Cricket Board for her work; ensuring that her club goes above and beyond on the welfare front and helped to deliver a safe and fun environment for all.</p>
<p><b>Eric Griffiths</b> (Trust Board Vice Chair) <i>HR Committee</i></p>	<p>Eric was appointed Trust Board Chair to the Central Region Schools Trust and had fulfilled the role successfully and with support to the Trust for over 10 years; more recently Eric has</p>

	<p>stepped down in his role as Chair and has taken on the role of Vice Chair in a supportive capacity.</p> <p>Eric Griffiths began his teaching career at Ipswich Civic College and subsequently taught a wide range of courses, including Pre-Vocational, GCSE and A Level. In 1985, he joined Suffolk County Council to work on the development of sixth form provision. He moved to the Midlands in 1988 to work for Wolverhampton Council and went on to become Chief Inspector of Schools.</p> <p>Eric was appointed as Executive Director for Education and Lifelong Learning in Sandwell in 2001. In 2005 he became interim Director of Education and Children's Services for that Borough. He left in March 2006 to set up an Educational Consultancy business, with much of his activity focusing on work with the Department for Education and the Baker Dearing Trust until his retirement in 2015.</p> <p>Eric is married with three grown up children and eight grandchildren. His leisure pursuits include walking both in this country and abroad.</p>
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<p><b>John Howard</b> <i>Chair to Audit and Risk Committee and Remuneration Committee</i></p>	<p>John Howard was re-appointed to the Central Region Schools Trust Board in March 2022 as a Trustee, having previously been a Trustee with Central RSA Academies Trust from April 2017 following a period of being an RSA Nominated Governor at Arrow Vale High School in Redditch, where he was Chair of the Audit and Human Resources Committee's.</p>
	<p>John has worked in education for over 40 years and since his retirement from full-time employment as a College Principal in the FE/HE sector, he has through the establishment of his own successful consultancy firm, worked with a range of secondary schools and colleges across a number of local authority areas, providing support in terms of post-inspection requirements, school/college improvement planning and curriculum development. He is confident in making use of this experience as a Trustee supporting the strategic direction of the Trust Board and the work/achievements of staff and students across all schools in the Trust family.</p> <p>John also served as a Lay Member/Non-Executive Director in the NHS in Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire over a period of 20 years, having a particular responsibility for good governance and Chaired the Audit and Remuneration Committee's.</p>

<b>Richard Davies</b> <i>Finance &amp; Resource</i>	 <p>Richard is the most recently appointed Trustee, and a long-standing member of the governance force across the Central Region School's Trust for over 10 years. Richard is the current Chair to the local board at Arrow Vale School and supports other Chairs within the Trust as part of the membership of the Chairs Forum. Richard has a great depth of knowledge of the values and distinctive culture of the trust, which provides him with a vast knowledge base on which to carry out the role of Trustee. He has particular insight to resources, health and safety and procurement which is an identifiable strength to the board's current constitution.</p>
	<p>Richard is an electrician by trade and uses his skillset to the benefit of the local community, not least in his appointment of Vice President to Birmingham Moseley Rugby Club. He aids in the maintenance of the club and offers professional estates advice and guidance on the club's estate management, a large facility.</p> <p>Richard engages in the community and particularly aligns to the Trustee role descriptor in holding the values and principles of public office.</p> <p>Richard has a stark awareness of procurement and resources in his support of the local cricket club, establishing strong community relationships and providing insight into a wealth of projects including solar PV installations.</p> <p><b>Experience:</b> Richard is committed to ensuring integrity and robust process of Trust Board activity, ensuring approvals and risk management across estates and procurement are monitored in a transparent and coherent way; aiding and committing to fully communicate any areas of concern or risk and ensuring processes are aligned with the Trust's strategic objectives.</p> <p><b>Skills:</b> HEALTH AND SAFETY, ESTATES STRATEGY &amp; PROCUREMENT</p>
<b>Orla MacSherry</b> <i>Chair to the Trust Board Audit and Risk Committee</i>	<p>Orla has been a Trustee for the Central Region Schools Trust since 2016 and has recently been appointed to the role of Chair of the Trust Board. Orla is also a Finance &amp; Resources</p>



**Committee Member.**

Orla is a debt finance lawyer and headed the real estate finance team of a leading city law firm for over a decade. She now provides consultancy services to investment banks and law firms. She has a wide range of experience in finance, management and governance. Orla has leveraged her professional experience for a number of years to provide support for the education sector and she is passionate about aiding social justice through the provision of exceptional schools.

Outside work Orla is a keen horse rider and tennis player.  
Orla is a fellow of the RSA.

<p><b>Christopher Smith</b>  <i>Education and Standards Committee</i></p> 	<p>Chris is the headteacher of South Bromsgrove High, a 13-18 single academy trust of approximately 1350 students in North Worcestershire. He has been headteacher since 2017 and prior to this has had roles as a Head of School, Deputy Headteacher, Assistant Headteacher, Director of Learning, Assistant Head of Science and Head of Biology.</p> <p>Chris strongly believes in the transformative power of education and was attracted to becoming a trustee of the Central Region Schools Trust by the Trust's commitment to social justice, particularly for those students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds. He is a member of the Education and Standards Committee where he hopes to support leaders within the Trust by drawing on his 25 years of experience working in education.</p> <p>Away from school, Chris is a big rugby fan and enjoys walking in the mountains, both in the UK and around the world.</p>
<p><b>Nasa Ahmed</b>  <i>Finance &amp; Resources Committee</i></p> 	<p>Nasa has been a Trustee for the Central Region Schools Trust since January 2025. Having attended one of the Trust's schools as a student, Nasa is keen to use his knowledge, skills and experience built up over his career in the public sector, to provide tangible benefit to the Trust as well as the communities in which it serves.</p> <p>Major Nasa Ahmed was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in April 2016. As a Troop Commander, he specialised in Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Search (EOD&amp;S) with operational deployments to Ukraine, Iraq, and West Africa. On promotion to Captain, he took a position as a training Officer before moving back to work in EOD&amp;S as a Regimental Operations Officer, responsible for a unit's force generation and management of operations. More recently he has commanded teams on operations across the globe before returning to the UK to perform the role of a Chief of Staff for a high readiness unit. In 2024, he was honoured to receive a King's Commendation for Valuable Service (KCVS) on the state honours list. Having promoted to Major in 2024, he is currently studying for a master's with King's College London.</p> <p>Outside of work, Nasa is a fitness focused globetrotter with an adventurous palate, he is always seeking the next adventure and the next bite.</p>