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**- Andrew Johnson,  
Executive Headteacher  
West Norfolk Academies Trust**





# A bright new look for a brave new world

*As the **West Norfolk Academies Trust** welcomes students back for a new school year, **Smithdon High School** in Hunstanton is the perfect example of the trust's forward thinking and optimistic outlook...*

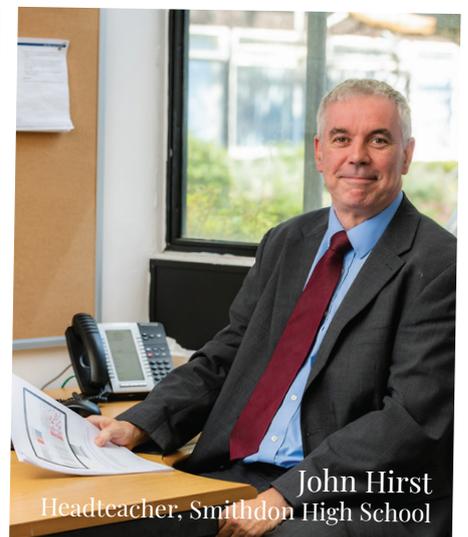
It's like a breath of fresh air. While the rest of the country (if not the world) tends towards the pessimistic, the West Norfolk Academies Trust (WNAT) is refreshingly optimistic and is remaining true to its core values. Now approaching its 10th anniversary, this collective of four local high schools, five primary schools, a junior and infant school continues to go above and beyond in providing a truly excellent education for the young people of West Norfolk.

"The trust has always been about supporting local schools and challenging them to raise the bar," says Executive Headteacher Andrew Johnson. "Through economies of scale

and shared resources we've achieved some truly incredible results to date - and we've managed to retain each school's unique identity and ethos - which is really important to the staff, the students, and their parents."

It's music to any parent's ears, which is particularly appropriate as the WNAT strengthens its musical pedigree with the appointment of Rob Galliard as Trust Director of Primary Music.

"We have a huge amount of musical talent here and the trust has employed new teachers for brass, strings, flute and clarinet," he says. "The events of this year will probably prevent us having a Christmas concert, but we've been building a virtual orchestra and our performances will be shown via



**John Hirst**  
Headteacher, Smithdon High School

YouTube - there are some real stars of the future here, and this will be a great time to catch them in their early years."

The forward-thinking ethos of the WNAT is never more evident than at Smithdon High School in Hunstanton. You'd have thought a school boasting world-famous architectural design would be tempted to rest on its laurels.

"We already had a 21st century curriculum, and we've spent the summer bringing our facilities into the 21st century as well," says John Hirst, who's just completed his first year as Headteacher at Smithdon. "This has always been a fantastic school and I think it's now one of the most exciting in the area. It has so much to offer students and we're very proud of what we've achieved."

It's hard to disagree with the Headteacher. Long established staff are being supported with new expertise and teaching talent and the school had been transformed.

Significant refurbishment over the summer has seen Smithdon given a fresh new look, with a new floor in the sports hall, a new look for the hard play areas, and a complete makeover for the classrooms.

Take the building formerly known rather impersonally as 'Block C' for example. It now has a distinct personality and all of its seven classrooms have been completely re-imagined from top to bottom. There's a new art gallery space, the food technology suite has been updated, and there are new pastoral and administrative offices.

The project also uncovered a few surprises, particularly in the form of a photographic archive charting Smithdon's rich history since it was constructed back in the late 1950s.

"It was a wonderful reminder that schools are also places where lifetime



friendships and memories develop," says John Hirst. "Smithdon has a very rich pedigree and that's something we'll be building on as we move into the future."

The school's most recent OFSTED inspection made a note of "rapid improvements" and that was certainly something that struck North West Norfolk MP James Wild on his recent visit.

"It was a real pleasure to visit Smithdon High School and see how much progress is being made here in an effort to help pupils reach their full potential," he said. "Education is the key to opportunity, and the school's ethos is all about giving young people more chances to learn and develop and to be successful - whether that's academically or through a rich programme of extra-curricular activities."

Since parents were made legally responsible for the education of their children almost 150 years ago, our entire school system has undergone enormous changes - and it's likely that 2020 will become another benchmark in the development of our education system. But while some people are focusing on the negative impact on the last school year, all twelve schools across the West Norfolk Academies Trust are looking to the future.

"For the last few months all we've been hearing about and reading

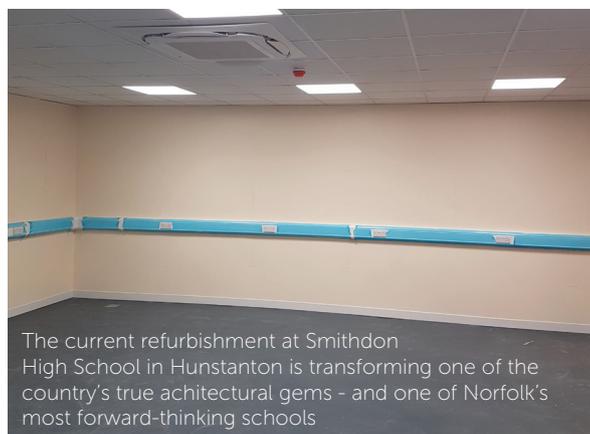


**ABOVE:** North West Norfolk MP James Wild, who praised the ethos of Smithdon High School on a recent visit

about is what we can't do," says Andrew Johnson. "As far as the trust is concerned, we're more interested in what we can do - and over the last few years we've consistently shown that we can do an awful lot."

As Smithdon High School welcomes a new generation of students and opens the doors on a new year, it's full of enthusiasm and optimism.

"The most important function of a school is to create better life chances and futures for its students," says Headteacher John Hirst. "Parents naturally expect good results as standard, but at Smithdon - and across the trust as whole - we offer students a fully-rounded and deeply-enriching experience."



The current refurbishment at Smithdon High School in Hunstanton is transforming one of the country's true architectural gems - and one of Norfolk's most forward-thinking schools