

HOLBROOK ACADEMY



Headteacher : Dr Simon Letman BA, MA, EdD
Deputy Head : Nicola Shelley

13th July 2016

Dear Parent / Carer,

I write at the end of another very successful year for the Academy. In all areas, our talented students have made their mark and they can all feel very proud indeed of what they achieved.

On the one hand, seven of our students were admitted to Mensa and many more achieved astonishingly high scores in the national maths challenge, whilst others represented the Academy regionally and also at national level in a wide range of sports, from basketball to equestrian eventing. This year, our under-15 boys' football team emphatically won the County championships in the final against Northgate and our girls' cricket team came second to Ipswich School in their county final. These are just a few examples of how we continue to punch above our weight and excel in all things.

You will recall that I wrote to you before Christmas with the good news that we had received an Ofsted 'Good' rating across all aspects of the Academy following our inspection at the end of October. This came on the back of our best set of GCSE results for many years last summer.

As I proudly reported at the time, this meant that we had become one of the leading schools in this part of Suffolk. However, we did not allow ourselves to rest on our laurels for too long, and work began straight away to address the recommendations made in the report about how we could become even better. That planning work is now complete and I have shared with you some of the key objectives we will all be working towards as we strive to become an outstanding school.

We are optimistic once again about this year's GCSE results. As you may have read in the media, from this year, the government has changed the main performance measure by which schools will be judged. Up until last summer, it was the percentage of students in Year 11 who achieved 5 or more A*-C grades, including Maths and English. Although schools will still generate this figure, now the key measure is the overall degree of progress students make across eight key subjects since they joined the school in Year 7. This figure is known as 'Progress 8' and we do feel that it is a fairer way of judging how well schools are performing. In the interests of clarity, when we report our results to you this year we will make reference to both the old and the new measures.

Changes to the Academy uniform in September 2017 are under consideration. Many students and parents have expressed the view that we should introduce blazers and shirts and ties for all students in place of polo shirts and sweatshirts. We are committed to exploring this fully and will be engaging in dialogue with parents from this September with a view to making a decision by Easter 2017 about what, if any, changes we will make for the 2017-2018 academic year. So watch this space for longer-term changes.

In the short-term, following a very well-argued and persuasive proposal from Year 10 students, I have agreed that all Year 11 students will wear black sweaters with white shirts and striped ties in September and not just the elected prefects. I was delighted to hear that all students wanted to look smarter and represent the Academy in the best light.

Once again, however, I need to make a plea for your support for our efforts to ensure that all students comply with our uniform regulations. I wrote to you recently about the issues we are consistently and frustratingly having to deal with. These mainly involve length of girls' skirts, the wearing of leggings rather than trousers and wearing trainers. By now, you should have received further details from the main office about what is and is not acceptable.

There are a number of staff changes for next year I would like to make you aware of. Staff leaving us are Mr Davenport, who is taking up the post of Head of Maths at Claydon High School and Mrs Byrne, who wishes to pursue other interests. They will both be missed and we wish them well in the future. Miss Laura Hodgkinson will be joining the maths department to replace Mr Davenport. She is an experienced teacher and a current England volleyball international.

We are also delighted that Miss Maddy Cooke will be starting with us in the Geography department. Miss Cooke grew up in Holbrook and she is thrilled to be returning to the area to work. Internally, Mr Terry Barrett will be returning to a full-time post in the History Department in September and Mrs Sarah Cooke will be assuming the key role of Assistant Head (Pastoral).

Other staff changes include Mrs Avril Reynolds and Mr Guy Law working part-time from September and Miss Krissy Quinton working part-time having recently returned to work after her maternity leave. Mr Maison Irwin will be joining the staff to provide additional languages teaching and to lead the department and Mr Alastair Blay has been appointed as a full-time Science teacher following Mrs Cooke's appointment and Mr Law's decision to semi-retire. We are delighted to have made such good external appointments to key posts this year at a time when nationally, teacher recruitment is such a major issue for schools.

Following a broad-based consultation exercise, involving parents, pupils and staff, we have decided not to make any changes to the way we organise our Forms for next year. A significant majority of parents who responded to our questionnaire felt that we should retain vertical forms for Key Stage 3 and staff and students broadly agreed with this. Many parents commented that the existing arrangement has helped their children's transition from primary to secondary school, encouraged friendships across year groups and allowed some Year 9's and 8's to take on a more caring and nurturing role within the school. Please note that some students may need to move forms for September as, due to the increase in our pupil numbers, there is a need to create three additional groups for next year. This will be explained to all those affected before the end of this term.

I am very pleased to report that we have been successful once again with our bid to the government for additional capital funding. We have recently received a major grant for £421,000 to replace our elderly and chronically leaking flat roof and work on the project will begin in the next few weeks. There will be minimal disruption to the school routine and we hope that the bulk of the work will be completed over the summer holiday.

One event next week I would like to draw your attention to is 'Through the Years' our student dance performance on Monday 18th July. The show has been brilliantly choreographed by the students themselves under Miss Shelley's supervision and it is being held to generate funds to support our next main school production. The show starts at 7:00pm and tickets can be obtained from main reception. Refreshments will be on sale.

Parents of Year 10 students should note that they will be coming home for the summer holiday with a Self-Review and Summer Learning Booklet. Teachers are encouraging Year 10 students to spend time studying over the holiday period in order to keep the momentum of learning going. Year 11 is a very demanding experience from the point of view of new GCSE courses and those students in the past who have taken the trouble to follow our advice have reaped the benefits in terms of their final grades. Please do ask your child about the work they have been given.

As I think you can see, we have all been very busy indeed this year as we continue to work hard on improving the experience of our students at the Academy. Once again, I would like to thank you all for your strong support and interest and for the way that you contribute to our thinking. The holiday is fast approaching and we are all looking forward to a well-earned rest. We wish you all a good summer and we hope that your children will return to us in September reinvigorated and ready to face the many challenges of a new and exciting academic year.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Letman', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr Simon Letman