

Thursday 1st March 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

RE: LETTER 4 OF 5 – MIDDLE SCHOOL

Tonight is our Year 11 parents' and carers' evening. Just before half-term the Year 11 s received their mock-GCSE examination results and tonight we shall give every family a chance to look at what they need to do in the coming months to maximise the chances of success. But GCSE success depends on what happens in Years 9 and 10, just as much as in Year 11.

Fortunately but not surprisingly, the recent inspection observed what we know to be at the heart of our great offer to students, particularly those who are keen to embrace the opportunities that we offer and provide:

"Teachers plan lessons that are often highly structured and very well planned. As a result, pupils' progress follows. In many areas of the school, inspectors saw work which was well presented and showed pupils' strong progress over time. Teachers often take opportunities to point out what pupils are doing well, which leads to an increase in confidence." (Ofsted, January 2018)

"Some teaching is inspirational. Where it is, pupils' work is prolific and strikingly well presented, and their progress rapid." (Ofsted, January 2018)

"Many teachers use questioning skilfully to improve pupils' knowledge. For example, in an art lesson, inspectors observed pupils articulately responding to their teacher's questions about artistic themes. In a geography lesson, the teacher used questioning to move pupils from factual recall and the use of technical vocabulary to detailed explanations of gorge erosion." (Ofsted, January 2018)

The Report also acknowledged the new target setting system we introduced last term for all GCSE age students, using Fisher Family Trust data to agree on targets for each student. Furthermore, we have greatly improved the way we assess your children so that those assessments better inform our future lesson planning but also help pinpoint the precise weakness that are holding your children back from greater success, and then come up with remedies.

"Leaders have ensured that assessments are accurate. They have done this through internal and external moderation. As a result, teaching is improving because teachers know who is doing well and who needs extra teaching to improve their progress." (Ofsted, January 2018)

Every day we see students in Years 9, 10 and 11 mature and grow in confidence. Whilst their attendance remains a worry and a concern, we see a significant improvement in behaviour in Years 10 and 11, with steadily improving attitudes to learning and a commitment to work hard and be successful.

"Over their time in the school, pupils become increasingly confident, approaching their lessons with determination. Inspectors saw many examples of pupils' diligent and prolific work and confidence in discussion and group work." (Ofsted, January 2018)

"Pupils say that there are some bullying incidents in school, but that their teachers deal with them well. Inspectors scrutinised the systems for dealing with bullying, through training for teachers and the way in which incidents in the past have been dealt with. This showed that the school is highly sensitive to bullying, is proactive in its approach and deals with issues well. The instances of bullying are falling over time." (Ofsted, January 2018)

HEADTEACHER
Mr Barry Doherty

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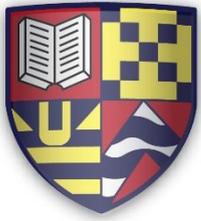
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We are acutely aware that being a young person in the modern age is fraught with dangers as well as opportunities. Therefore our commitment to a first class academic school life is matched by our Learning 4 Life programme that was warmly praised and acknowledged to be highly relevant for the lives our children face, not the ones we ideally seek:

“Teachers make sure that pupils’ welfare is improved both in and out of school. For example, they teach pupils about sexting and gang, drug and knife crime. They make sure that pupils know about sexual exploitation, consent and trafficking. As a result, pupils feel more confident and well informed about risks.” (Ofsted, January 2018)

Years 9 and 10 students have all made a solid start to their courses. Year 9s, in particular, are benefiting from the curriculum review and the significant increase in the time allocated to each course over a three year period. Meanwhile, Year 11 students are on course to achieve superb grades in both English and Mathematics, based on their very promising mock examinations just before Christmas. In many ways these mock results were no great surprise given the year group’s very positive reputation. But there is a long way to go and nothing is secure or in the bag. Futures remain flexible and uncertain and this is a great thing because it means that students making good progress can do even better before the summer and those students who are lagging behind their personal potential have time to re-shape the future so that it better reflects who they are and who they want to be.

So, how are we going to improve?

Students: We have everything in place for you: teachers, facilities, revision programmes, advice, guidance and support. But all of this amounts to nothing unless your heart and your mind has decided to go on that journey of success with us. That means committing to very high levels of attendance, behaving with consideration and maturity at all times but, perhaps most of all, working with greater urgency at an earlier point in your GCSEs. Too many amongst you underestimate how hard you either need to work, or how hard children in many other schools are working, in order to be successful. You will not be competing against your classmates in life, you will be competing against those other GCSE age students who may or may not be edging past you for those courses, apprenticeships, jobs and careers. In the end, your brainpower matters, but it will be your heart and your mind that determines how successful you will be.

Families: Like your children’s teachers, you will need to draw upon a skill to demand high expectations whilst retaining that compassion and empathy for the pressures faced by GCSE age children. As your children approach their GCSE examinations you have to ensure they are ‘putting in the hours’ by attending school every single day and setting aside time each evening, at weekends and during the holidays to prepare for those examinations. If you don’t then other parents will. If your children don’t then other children will. We live in a meritocracy that rewards those that do above those that don’t and therefore we owe it to our children to give them every advantage in life to be successful.

Colmers: We will further improve the way we design and deliver lessons so that every child can feel confident about their learning and how to make improvements. We will be more focused on helping to pinpoint precise weakness with individual children and helping them to overcome those weakness or develop the revision skills necessary to perform successfully in examinations. Meanwhile, additional support and intervention services will continue to provide much-needed academic, social and emotional help when needed.

Yours sincerely,

Barry Doherty, Headteacher

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