

3<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

Dear Parent/ Carer,

I wrote this letter on the final weekend of half term and had started it with a welcome back and a nod to the support that all gave on the final Friday before half term in the challenging weather. Sadly, the extremes and challenges of weather have also featured in the events of this week, and apologies for any disruption that the closure yesterday caused. I hope you can understand the decision to close is one that can never be taken lightly, and the call to shut was only made when it was clear the conditions started to affect the school site and the transport scenario clearly made opening impossible.

I wanted to write to say welcome back and to signpost a few opportunities to be involved in the life of the school. I am conscious of how many letters families receive from us, and it's a fine line to find the balance of keeping you informed but also not overwhelming busy people's inboxes! If anyone has any feedback I'm always keen to listen.

### 1. Parent Pop in – Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> November

One of the messages I've been keen to promote since I was appointed is that this a school for all of our community. I want staff and students to see it as theirs, to have a sense of feeling of belonging and togetherness, but also ownership over the space and a pride in what we stand for collectively. But this applies to you all too, it should be a school that you feel you know and feel invested in. Your views matter as we seek to continuously improve, and I'll be sending a survey to capture those views later this half term, but I wanted to try and find more ways to offer opportunities to come into Farlingaye and see what we do. Therefore we are pleased to be offering our first "Parent pop-in" (I'm still not entirely sold on the title but I didn't like "coffee with the head" either!) on November 16<sup>th</sup>. It will run 9.45-11am, and offer a chance for a tour of the school, meet key staff and a chance to interact with some students who will tell you a little more about the things they have been involved in. The intention is to offer a termly snapshot of the school, a chance to meet with us and see for yourself the school in it's working life. If you would like to come along please sign up on the following link:

[https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=qgWf\\_CHgIkG3vJFDsWTzsXxY8TZmVe1Dgal eKppwS69UNVVYTkhFNzNEOURRNzM4QzJHSFNWVjIGRS4u](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=qgWf_CHgIkG3vJFDsWTzsXxY8TZmVe1Dgal eKppwS69UNVVYTkhFNzNEOURRNzM4QzJHSFNWVjIGRS4u)

### 2. GCSE certificate evening – Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> November

The return of full GCSE examinations in the summer just gone was a huge challenge for the year 11 who had seen so much of their education disrupted. They performed superbly well, and should be proud of their achievements at what is a major milestone in their lives. We would like to celebrate those achievements with our GCSE Certificate evening. A chance for last year's GCSE cohort to collect their official documentation and to perhaps see those students who have gone on to do different things with their education post 16. I was once told that as a nation we are too modest and we're all too quick to underplay our achievements so let's use this to celebrate the success of our brilliant young people. We'll send a letter to the cohort next week but please put the date in the diary.

### 3. RAAC update

Our temporary classrooms are all up and running and so are our new changing room facilities....We're also excited that our new "container" library should be installed in the next few weeks, which we think should bring extra space for students and also thankfully a new (temporary) home for our fabulous

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Mrs Mason. Whilst the logistics of all that are underway, we have also commissioned the first of the corrective works to address the RAAC issue itself. These will first address the issues affecting several spaces in Creative Arts (including Mrs Parks' new drama room!) and we're hopeful we can use these from some point in December onwards, with further works to follow to address the concrete in other spaces. Staff and students have been utterly fantastic in their flexibility in how they had adapted to change and I can't thank the response of the local community in their offers of support, materials and general positivity enough. As our new changing facilities are now fully functional, from Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November please can students return to wearing their uniform every day, bringing PE kit to change in to for lessons or clubs.

#### **4. Attendance matters**

I'm sure you are aware that there is a national crisis in attendance in schools. The closures during the pandemic, compounded by wider issues such as rising mental health problems in young people, the cost-of-living and significant industrial action, all seem to have contributed to a growing crisis. Before the Covid pandemic attendance in schools hovered around 95%, meaning on average a young person missed one day in 4 weeks. Last year, average attendance nationally was around 90%, or 1 day every 2 weeks. Poor attendance at school has serious implications with a clear link between low attendance and lower attainment outcomes for pupils. Studies showed that based on GCSE outcomes for 22/23 pupils who missed less than 1% of school across Year 10 and 11 performed on average more than half a grade better in subjects. For those whose attendance fell below 80% or more significantly underperformed. But whilst achievement is hugely important to what we do here, schools are more than results. Regular school attendance promotes a wider set of benefits, from social skills to healthy living and personal development. I fully appreciate that a crisis in school attendance is a symptom rather than a cause, a manifestation of complex issues across the education system and in wider society, but some of the evidence produced recently highlighted a few issues I have reflected on. One of these is the school's role and ensuring that relations between school and parents meant that you all felt informed about what we're doing, and hopefully some of the communication from myself attempts to address this. However another reason suggested for the issues we face, was termed an "Other People's Children" challenge, where families viewed problems in school attendance didn't not affect their families. This is apparently driven by two key beliefs by some parents: 1. Their children's attendance was very good (regardless of whether this would be officially seen in that way) and they 'didn't keep their kids off' to an unreasonable extent. 2. When their children did miss school, it was for a very good reason. Therefore, any problems with the rate of absence and the reasons for absence were driven by 'other people's children', and were not their responsibility.

The point of including a comment on attendance in this letter was definitely not to antagonise nor to call into question any absence faced. As a father of two, I fully appreciate that children, like adults, get ill and that at times absence can't be helped. But if it can be helped, or if there's anything we can do to support please do let us know. We have fabulous pastoral support teams here, but also wider support in terms of our attendance team, student support and safeguarding provision who are always happy to help. We ultimately want the same thing as you all, which is to provide the right circumstances for your child to exceed the potential they have.

Wishing you all a lovely November, and I hope to see many of you on the 16<sup>th</sup> or the 21<sup>st</sup> of November.

Yours sincerely

**Mr P Smith**  
Headteacher