

12th July 2023



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Dear Parent/Carer,

I wanted to write to you to mark the end of term and to introduce myself as the new Headteacher at Farlingaye from September.

I was immensely proud to be offered the role of Headteacher and firmly believe that this is a wonderful school with a huge amount of potential for growth and development. Since I was offered the job in December, I have enjoyed numerous conversations with students, staff and families, as well as other members of our wider community, in order to listen to their views about how Farlingaye needs to progress. What is clear from all stakeholders is that, after a challenging time, we are all ready to take the school forward and further improve on the existing sound base. These views echo my own. It is clear that we are working from a strong position but we now need to set our sights incredibly high and meet the challenge to establish ourselves as one of the best schools in the region. I appreciate that this is a bold statement to write – but what does that mean? When Ofsted inspected the school in 2022 their definition of the very best schools were those that were a ‘beacon of excellence’ in all areas; that the traits and aspects of the school should be so impressive that they stand as an example to others. So that is our challenge. In every aspect, whether that is our pastoral support, the curriculum that we offer, or extra-curricular provision, we should be aiming to be a beacon of excellence. And we have to be restless until we reach this. As that is what our students deserve.

In order to do this, I want to look to address several key areas from September. I felt it was important to share some of these that directly affect you and your students before the summer.

### Mobile Phones

From the start of term in September, the school will move to a “Gate-to-Gate” policy for mobile phones for years 7-11. Phones can be brought to school but must be switched off and stored in bags and not be seen on the school site. If phones are seen, phones will be confiscated, placed in a marked envelope and stored securely in the main office. Phones can then be signed for by the student and returned at the end of the school day. Obviously, there may be times during the school day when you need to contact your child for an important reason, and the school office is there for this purpose.

The reasoning for this change in policy is to address a growing concern regarding the use of phones in schools. Unfettered and unrestricted access via mobile data in school time means students could be accessing inappropriate material and potentially sharing these with other students leading to safeguarding concerns. Also, in a wider sense, being constantly connected means that attention is naturally taken away from the learning or the task at hand. Even the presence of a phone is a distraction. The school has been reviewing the research on this matter over the past year and has been considering making a change to our policy, but I have decided to use September 2023 as a clear starting point for a new approach. Therefore, from September we will be moving to this clear

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“Gate-to-Gate” policy. Students have been told of this on Wednesday afternoon, and I would appreciate your support with this new approach in order to help us have a community that is settled, focused, and free of electronic distraction.

### **Uniform**

Dr Sievewright recently communicated with parents and carers about the importance of our school uniform and also that we are always happy to engage in a dialogue about making sure it meets the needs of our students. Several of our students have expressed a preference for shorts as part of a summer uniform, and I was impressed by the strength of feeling and community engagement our students were able to muster with their cause. When I met with representatives of these students, I couldn't help but be impressed by their ability to articulate their message and the reasoning behind what they were saying. We will consult fully in the autumn term, and that will be an open forum for discussion. What we need to do though, is raise current standards on what is already part of what we wear. A uniform ensures we appear smart and also gives us a sense of community and belonging. We need to ensure that we set a high standard for all. From September students need to ensure skirts are no more than 4 inches above the knee, shirts need to be tucked in and hoodies are not to be worn.

### **Community Involvement**

One of the best parts of my role in the last nine years has been to welcome prospective parents, students and teachers to the school. I think only by being in school can you gain a true sense of what we do here at Farlingaye, meeting our fabulous students and incredibly engaging teachers. I would like to ensure that all families have a chance to visit the school at different times in their child's journey through their school experience here. Therefore, we're going to make sure there are a range of opportunities to do that. I know that virtual parents' evenings are great in the sense that they fit in with busy schedules, but in-person experiences are always useful to provide a chance for parents to be in school and meet with a range of staff. Therefore, from September both the Year 7 and Year 11 parents' evenings will be held in school. They will offer a chance for both parents of those newly joining us, and for those of students who are preparing to sit GCSE examinations to meet a broader range of staff at what is a crucial time.

I will be immensely proud to be Headteacher of such a wonderful school. This will not be my school though, or a school that belongs to the governors or the wider trust. This is *our* school. A school which students need to feel they have a stake in, one that our parents feel part of, and one which the wider community is proud of. I am confident that as we enter the new term, we can establish ourselves as a restless and forward-thinking school which offers the best possible opportunities for all students to thrive and exceed their potential here.

Have a wonderful summer,

Peter Smith

Headteacher from September 2023