



16 December 2014

Dear Parents/Carers

### **Autumn Term 2014 Newsletter**

We welcomed our new Year 7 students on 3 September, who have settled in very well to life here, quickly getting used to new procedures, new subjects and mixing with the older students. I am very pleased to see so many of them getting involved in our enrichment activities and making lots of new friends. Next September our Pupil Admission Number for year 7 will grow by another 10 places to 150 due to our increasing popularity.

We also welcomed many new students into our Sixth Form. The vast majority of them are studying A Levels and/or level 3 BTEC courses which will mean more students from here being able to access university places and careers in the professions. I am really delighted that the 37 year 13 students who applied to study a degree at university last year were all offered a place and are now just coming to the end of their first term at university. Some of them are now studying at Russell Group universities, which is a first for the academy. This year, we have 42 year 13 students applying to university which is even better, and one of them has had an interview for a place at Cambridge University to study Maths and Physics. She is now waiting to hear whether or not they will offer her a place.

The GCSE examination results which were published in August were disappointing in comparison to previous years with 53% of students gaining 5 A\* - C grades including English and Maths. Although we did reach our formal target of 53% for that year group, we were hoping that we could do better than this. However, it soon became apparent that the majority of schools across the country have experienced a similar drop in attainment due to changes in the examination system and government imposed changes on how the performance of schools is measured. The following bullet points detail those changes:

- All qualifications are now worth 1 GCSE regardless of their 'weight' and a maximum of two non-GCSEs count. This means that BTEC courses, which were worth 2 or 4 GCSE passes are now only worth 1, and that only up to 2 BTEC courses will count in the performance tables.
- Only terminally assessed GCSEs will count in performance tables. Modular GCSEs such as those previously sat for science and RS no longer count.

## **ASPIRING FOR EXCELLENCE**



- Only the first entry counts towards performance measures – this means we have not been able to enter students for GCSE mathematics in a targeted manner, which has been successful in improving both A\*-C grades and the proportion of higher grades in previous years.
- The assessment for GCSE English was changed part way through the course to remove the speaking and listening element that has been a strength of our students. The exam aspect increased from 40% to 60%.
- Level 2 BTEC qualifications now contain an element of compulsory external examination, which impacted on the BTEC Science results.

It is very difficult to adjust to changes like this without the time to plan effectively and I think a lot of schools have found themselves in the same position as us. However, we have now received the RAISE Online information, which is Ofsted's analysis of our results in a national context and the report shows that the academy actually did very well:

- We have achieved just above the national average for 5 A\* - C grades including English and maths at GCSE.
- Our value-added, a measure which demonstrates how much better the students have achieved in comparison to their target grades, has improved significantly to 1042.3. This means that our students achieved about 1½ grades higher than expectations. This puts us in the top 4% of schools in the country for progress, which is brilliant.

The School Performance Tables are published by the DfE in late January, which is when we will all be able to access the results of all schools in the country for comparison.

Year 11 have just completed their mock exams and the results are looking very promising for the summer. We have now had more time to plan for the impact of those changes I mentioned earlier for this year group, so we are confident that our results will improve in August 2015. We are still waiting for the data on the Year 13 A Level mock results to be collated, but reports will be going out to parents for both year groups this week.

In the summer holidays, I took a group of three students to meet Malala Yousafzai to discuss her campaign for girls' education in Pakistan and the publication of her new book. Ms Judeh, who co-ordinates our involvement in the BBC's School Report, organised it following a request by the BBC asking if we would like to be involved. The interview was filmed by the BBC and is available on their website: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/28483501>. It was a wonderful experience for all of us to meet Malala; she is clearly an inspiration to us all. She communicates a very strong message on why education is important for all children and young people,

both boys and girls. Not only does it lead to qualifications that enable access to further and higher education, and productive career pathways, but it also gives us the ability to think, to problem solve and to reason, skills which enable us to lead independent and successful lives. When it was announced that Malala had won the Nobel Peace Prize, the BBC interviewed the three students, who had met her in the summer, for their reaction. That interview is available at:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/schoolreport/29573285>. It was a real privilege to meet Malala and a reminder that we should not take the opportunities that our education system provides for granted, as so many children in other countries across the world have little or no access to that.

Below are some important dates that you will need for the Spring Term 2015:

| Date                                | Event   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Monday 5 January                    | All students return to school at 8.40 a.m.  |
| Thursday 29 January                 | Year 11/Year 13 Parents' Consultation Evening and Full Reports issued 4.30 – 6.30 p.m.    |
| Thursday 12 February                | Years 12 Parents' Consultation Evening and Full Reports issued 4.30 – 6.30 p.m.           |
| Friday 13 February                  | Break up for half-term  |
| Wednesday 25 February               | Year 10 Progress Grade Reports Issued   |
| Tuesday 24 February                 | Students return to school at 8.40 a.m.  |
| Thursday 5 March                    | Year 9 Parents' Consultation and Options Evening and Full Reports issued 4.00 – 7.00 p.m. |
| Tuesday 10 March                    | Year 7 Progress Grade Reports issued  |
| Tuesday 17 March                    | Year 8 Progress Grade Reports issued  |
| Thursday 19 March                   | Music and Dance Concert   |
| Friday 27 March                     | End of term for students and staff  |
| Saturday 28 March – Sunday 12 April | Easter Holidays   |

I would like to thank you all for the support you give to your daughter and the academy to help her progress and achieve success. This term finishes on Friday 19 December at 1.00 p.m. for the students and we all start back on Monday 5 January 2015 at 8.40 a.m.

For those who celebrate Christmas, I trust you will all have a lovely and peaceful one. Yet to you all, enjoy the holiday with your families and friends, and I wish you a happy and prosperous New Year for 2015.

Yours sincerely

Nicola Walters  
Headteacher