



ST. AIDAN'S

CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Dear Parent/Carer,

23rd February 2024

A warm welcome back after the half term break to you and your families. Please forgive this somewhat long letter from me but, as we are now at the mid-point in the academic year, I thought it was a good time to write to you to reflect on our progress and achievements in the first half of the year and look forward to the plans for the second part of this academic year.

Examinations and Outcomes

We are thrilled to share with you that the validated information from the DfE confirms that our 2023 progress score for students at the end of KS4 continues to be well above the national average. This score of +0.52 puts St Aidan's in the top 5% of school nationally, 5th in North Yorkshire, and the highest performing state secondary school in Harrogate. Our KS5 results remain above the national average, and we continue to work closely with St John Fisher to ensure that our Associated Sixth Form goes from strength to strength. We are delighted and very proud of our year 13 students who, after 7 years of education at St Aidan's for many, are securing places at university, apprenticeships, employment, or making plans for gap years to enhance their life experiences. Education is an ongoing process to be embraced through life and so we wish them all well as they become young adults embracing the opportunities that their lives ahead hold for them.

Our year 11 students have just completed their mock exams and teachers are in the process of analysing the data so that we can use the results to look at where any gaps in knowledge may be. We will use this in-depth analysis to inform our intervention strategies for students who need additional support to achieve their target grades. We are also looking closely at those students who struggled through this difficult time to ensure we put the right emotional support in place. It is so important to us that students know we care for them and that we will nurture them through these next few months. If you feel that your child is struggling in any way, please do reach out to us so we can do all we can support.

Wi-Fi and Mobile Devices

Some of you may be aware that we had a problem with our monitoring and filtering system at the end of last term which meant we have had to do a considerable amount of work on ensuring our systems are working as they should to protect all users whilst in the school. I am pleased that this work has all been completed and our Wi-Fi, along with the filtering and monitoring systems, are compliant and working as they should. We also took the opportunity to revise our BYOD policy (Bring Your Own Device) to make sure there was clarity for both students and staff around the use of mobile phones and other devices. This policy will shortly be available but in the meantime, please be reminded that students in years 7 to 11 must not use a mobile phone in school at any time unless they are asked to by a member of staff. If students do bring mobile phones to school, they must be always switched off during the school day. We continue to put safeguarding and student safety at the top of our agenda, and we are only too aware of the results of extensive research done about the distraction to learning of mobile phones, but more importantly the link that mobile phone use has on the negative wellbeing of students and to increased incidents of bullying and cyberbullying. In the past few days, the government has issued their guidance to headteachers on mobile phone use in schools; we welcome and support this guidance.

Headteacher: Mrs S Dover

Positive Behaviour System

Thank you all for your patience and support as we launched our new positive behaviour system for years 7 to 11 at the start of January. The system was introduced as we realised that so many students come to school day in day out, working hard, being polite, kind, courteous, and thoughtful, yet we had no means to recognise and celebrate this. We also realised that we had a very small number of students for whom the normal school day presents many challenges, and their needs were getting missed because we could not easily track and monitor where their difficulties were. Our new system allows us to identify these students and their behaviour choices so that we can put appropriate interventions in place to make sure we can meet their individual needs. The Department for Education has recently issued their advice on Behaviour in Schools, and we welcome this guidance to support us in promoting high standards of behaviour that provides the necessary support to ensure all students can achieve and thrive both in and out of the classroom. This results in a calm, safe and purposeful learning environment for everyone. It has been wonderful to see the number of positive behaviour points being given to all students; in fact, 94% of all points given out since the start of January have been positive, allowing us to celebrate the incredible culture of integrity, determination, aspiration, and kindness that we have here at St Aidan's. Teachers have noticed a much calmer, more purposeful learning environment in the classroom and a reduction in low level behaviour which could sometimes disrupt the flow of learning. Many students have already received their Birch Cross certificate in recognition for the number of positive points they have collected. Well done to everyone. We do, however acknowledge that this new system has taken away the necessity to record behaviour in student planners and this has led to some parents feeling less informed about how their child is doing on a day-to-day basis. As a result of parent feedback, we are looking into how we can report this to parents, possibly by the introduction of a parental App. As we move our MIS system from Bromcom to Arbor for September 2024 we hope to have this in place and will keep you informed of how this will work.

The Start of The School Day

We are grateful to all our students who are following our new arrangements for the start of the school day. All students are encouraged to be on site no earlier than 8:30am unless they are attending an organised event which is supervised by a member of staff. Teachers often arrive early in school to prepare for the school day, but they are not obliged to be on duty and responsible for students on site until 8:35am. For this reason, students who do arrive before 8:30am will continue to be asked to wait in the canteen area, the outdoor seating area, or the central tennis courts, where we have a few volunteer staff on duty before the start of the day. Sixth form students may use the sixth form café, the sixth form study centre, or the library and lower school students may still purchase breakfast from the sixth form café if needed. We have been operating this system for a few months now and it is working well so thank you for your continued support with this.

We have also had a focus on punctuality. On Monday the 4th December 2023 we had 104 students who arrived late to school (after 8:45am). On Monday the 22nd January 2024, five weeks after we had launched our process for notifying parents and recording student lates, we only had 4 students who were late for school. The start of the day at St Aidan's is one of the most important times for our students; it is the time when students are seen by their form tutor, checked that they are okay, and set up for a positive day. We also deliver our PSHE curriculum, our collective worship, and our assembly programme between 8:45 and 9:10am so I am delighted that this focus on punctuality has allowed us to make sure that all students are now accessing this important time and that we are able to check in with every student at the start of the day.

School Admissions

It is humbling to know that St Aidan's is still the first-choice school for many families. Our high academic achievements, incredible extra-curricular offer, and unique way in which we really do care and nurture every one of our students as individuals, continues to be recognised by the communities we serve. Despite the rumours that we will be introducing yellow blazers and knee socks for all, we had a record number of families choosing us for their children in September 2024 (I promise you there are no plans for yellow blazers and knee socks so please don't believe all that you hear!). On the 1st of March 280 year 6 children will receive the news that they have been offered a place here at St Aidan's and we therefore look forward to welcoming the next cohort of children into our loving family. We have also had a very high number of students apply to our Associated Sixth Form; we do of course give preference to our current students who gain the required grades, but we have places for 350 young people from September 2024 so we know we will also be welcoming many newcomers into our Year 12.

Curriculum Intent and Implementation

The curriculum at St Aidan's is central to the success of our students. We pride ourselves on offering a curriculum that is rich in breadth giving all students the opportunity to thrive, becoming confident learners with enquiring minds. With the support of our first-class Careers Advice and Guidance team, our students at key stage 4 and 5 are supported in making the choices that are right for them. We make sure they get a balanced education which delivers the skills and knowledge needed for lifelong learning and success. In line with the National Curriculum requirements, our students at the end of year 8 get the opportunity to make a preference as to which subjects within art and technology they wish to continue to study into year 9. More information about this will be coming out to parents and students in year 8 shortly. Our year 9 students have started to think about what choices they wish to make for their GCSE subjects, and we look forward to presenting this process to parents on Wednesday the 28th of February. Please do join us if you have a child in year 9.

From September 2024 our PSHE curriculum will be taught as a separate timetabled subject at KS3. Our excellent Personal, Social, Health and Economic programme of study will be taught by a smaller specialist group of staff, and we feel that this will allow us to strengthen the personal development offer that we provide to our students to support their wellbeing and knowledge of citizenship. KS4 and 5 students will continue to have a comprehensive PSHE curriculum delivered through form time, assemblies, drop down days and Living Well lessons. All students continue to receive an excellent Religious Studies education; this is at the heart of our offer where our theologically rooted Christian vision drives our ethos and allows all our students to flourish.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. We will continue to send out our monthly InTouch magazine which is a wonderful celebration of many of the things we achieve here at St Aidan's, and I hope that you find this correspondence helpful. It is an absolute privilege to serve you and your children, and I give you my word that I will make sure we do all we can as a school to enable them to have the best education, care, and support possible. I do however acknowledge that we don't always get everything right for everyone all the time so please do continue to contact us if you have any concerns, observations or suggestions. As Spring is approaching and the days are getting lighter, I pray that you all have health and happiness and that we continue to work together to ensure our young people receive the care and support they need, whenever they need it.

Yours faithfully,



Mrs Siân Dover
Headteacher