



**April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

**Dear Etonbury Parents and Carers,**

Well, this term has certainly flown past and yesterday you will have received the Etonbury Echo celebrating a wide range of student achievement across the academic, community and sporting fields. I hope you have had time to read it.

There are of course lots more exciting changes coming to Etonbury Academy, and I wanted to take this opportunity, as I always do, to put you, the parents and carers that underpin and support all that we do, in the picture.

There have been lots of successes, and a few trials, but I am very happy with the progress we continue to make in transforming Etonbury into a school that is the pride of the community – and a school where an incredible 99.2% of you said your children were happy to be in our recent survey.

### **Challenge Partners Quality Assurance Review**

After two years of unprecedented growth and change the Senior Team and I felt it was time for a very thorough independent review of our progress. To that end we joined the national Challenge Partners Network. This is an enormously respected organisation of more than a thousand schools who conduct the most rigorous and in-depth inspections of schools available. As a result, three weeks ago we had a review over the course of three days, led by an OFSTED inspector and supported by a further team of four Challenge Partners comprised of Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers.

The report states very clearly that they believe the school is now very securely in the “Good” category under the new much more challenging inspection regime, with many areas at high good. I was delighted they named our Behaviour and Ethos as an area of National Excellence. Given the scale of change and expansion here, this is very gratifying – most schools that attempt far less see a drop in behaviour and standards during such a large transformation programme.

They were absolutely glowing and full of praise for the school, its students and staff, and what has been achieved here so far.

## **Canteen**

As you know, last September we brought the catering management back in-house. This has not been without some challenges, but after careful consideration and feedback from you, students and staff, we felt it was the right thing to do to provide a better service going forward as the school grows.

Therefore we introduced a new broader menu, with more options for students, and have recently invested in an on-line and biometric payment system. Feedback on this has been very positive, with parents and carers liking the ease of use, and the App that allows them to see what their child is buying.

In the changeover, we initially faced some bedding in issues, along with an encouraging growth in student demand. We responded quickly and installed an additional fixed till, and a mobile till (essentially a tablet) that can be used at times of high demand.

Coupled with a change in canteen layout, and the way food is served, this has led rapidly to a reduction in queuing times (average is now 12 minutes or less), and increased speed through the tills (average 8 seconds to make payment).

We are continuing to monitor this closely, and will be introducing further enhancements to the service in the coming weeks and months. I will keep you updated.

## **Bike helmets**

A huge thank you for all your support with this! Following our consultation with you, and your overwhelming recommendation to make this compulsory, we have been absolutely delighted that the numbers of students cycling without protective headwear has fallen dramatically to just one or two on any given day. Please do keep reinforcing this message at home, as we all know how important it is.

## **Lockers**

Again, we consulted with you, and as a result introduced new school lockers throughout the school for all year groups. Take up has been steady, and we strongly recommend that if you haven't already booked one please do so. Please also make sure you book one during the course of next term for September 2017.

You can do it all here:

[www.ilsschools.co.uk](http://www.ilsschools.co.uk)

## Sports



It's hard to know where to start with this one! Etonbury teams are now an absolute sporting powerhouse in the area, and place highly or win many tournaments and local and regional competitions.

We share highlights and celebrate successes and effort regardless of outcome continually through our Facebook page.

A few major highlights this term include:

- Year 5 Netball team - District Champions and 4th in County finals
- Year 7 Netball team - District Champions and 4th in County finals
- KS2 Girls Football - District Champions and awaiting County finals
- KS2 Girls - First in Cross Country Relays



Year 7 Girls Indoor Athletics - District Champions and County Champions

## **Yr5 Trip**

After many years of visiting Aylmerton in Norfolk, we decided to change the trip this year after careful consideration of what would be sustainable in the future. Aylmerton were not able to cope with the numbers we now have, and we also felt that for cost and welfare issues a three night trip as opposed to a four night trip would have added benefits going forward.

The new venue, Kingswood in Kent was hugely enjoyable and I was delighted to learn that students once again had the opportunities to build and share experiences and memories that will last a lifetime and develop independent skills and confidence that will serve them well in the years to come. I was particularly pleased with the uptake, with the highest proportion of students ever (85%) of the year group going. This is excellent, as we wanted to ensure the trip was as inclusive as possible for the entire year group.

## **SATs preparation**

We are in the final push for the SATs this year, and throwing every resource we have available at supporting the students to do the very best they can.

We have ensured that our staff have the availability to provide wide-ranging interventions and small-group teaching and coaching in an innovative new programme of additional support.

Further, we are continuing our partnership work with Tennyson Road Primary, and shifted all our preparation and student work materials to the highly successful Rising Stars programme from September 2016.

Our focus though, remains the wellbeing and happiness of our students at all times. We manage the SATs process very carefully in order to try to reduce student stress and disruption to the wider curriculum. Last year there were endless reports of students in tears and suffering emotional harm at schools across the country. This is not us, and this is not how we do things here, despite the immense pressures from Government and the Department for Education to deliver the highest possible outcomes regardless of student needs and welfare.

## **Phase 2 Build Programme**

This is commencing on April 24th, with the whole programme breaking ground on multiple locations across the site simultaneously. This will create a greater challenge in terms of school management than Phase 1 did, and we are planning for that now. However, we will of course be operating as normal throughout the build programme.

As it stands at the moment:

- The KS2 expansion (an additional four classrooms, refurb of existing block, and extra prebuilt facilities with improvements to play areas and zoning) will be complete ready for September 2017.
- New Main Reception Centre should also be complete for September 2017, as the key point of entry to the secure school area of the site.

- Additional hard standings and play space should be coming on stream from September 2017 onward.
- New additional teaching block (science labs, food tech rooms, computer suites, general classrooms) scheduled for completion by April 2018.
- Community Nursery (to be confirmed).

This is of course, another ambitious build programme being run as a joint project between BEST, Etonbury Academy and Central Beds Council. It will mostly complete the Etonbury expansion plan, and provide even more brand new facilities for our students and the community. More updates soon.



## **School Budget**

If you have been following the national news over the past few months it will come as no surprise to you that school budgets are under immense pressure, and the situation is deteriorating rapidly. Central Bedfordshire is one of the lowest funded authorities for education in the UK already, so the additional cuts (approximately 8% in real terms) are an immense challenge.

Our operating budget is now under severe pressure, as is the case in most schools. This is not the same as the capital build budget, which is entirely separate. We cannot transfer funds from one to the other.

The school operating budget is the total amount we have available to staff and run every aspect of the school for a financial year. It includes everything from recruitment and staff all the way through to building maintenance, safety certification, books, resources, technology, mini-buses, and even cleaning materials.

Like virtually every other school in the country we are likely to face some difficult decisions over the coming months in terms of most, if not all areas of school operations. This will impact on provision and many of the additional services and opportunities we offer to students, parents and carers. My focus is on doing all I can to minimise these impacts and create alternatives. We will need to look at developing additional revenue streams and further fundraising activities including corporate sponsorship.

I will write to you with further details in due course.

## **Recruitment**

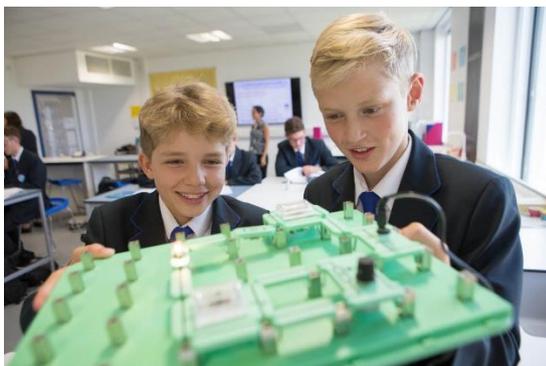
Once again, in a very difficult recruitment market we are recruiting strongly and are confident of filling all the teaching roles required. However, it is likely given the further tightening of budgets that some support roles will need to be postponed.

We have recruited the following KS3, KS4 and KS5 specialists to join Team Etonbury:

- A new Head of Maths\* from Sharnbrook Academy
- A new Head of Music\* and Drama Teacher (combined role) from Kings Langley School
- A new Art Teacher from Chauncey School
- A new Head of Business and teacher of Computing, German and Maths from SWA (combined role)
- A new second in Science from Harlington Upper School
- A new head of PSHCE and Maternity Cover Sendco from The Wren Academy, N. London
- A new Maths teacher from SCITT
- Two new KS2 teachers from the Beds/Herts area

We are currently working to complete our requirements with an additional English Teacher and a new MFL Teacher.

\*Please be assured Mr Bodger and Miss Barnett are staying with us as hugely committed and valued members of the team, but with modified roles and new responsibilities.



It is always difficult to decide what to put in these letters, and what to leave out (otherwise it would be twice the length and I think I've taken enough of your time already!). I hope that this has given you some useful insight and information that as parents and carers you would want to know, and that it keeps you informed of the rapid development of Etonbury Academy.

So all that remains for me now is to thank you for all your support this term, and to wish you a very happy Easter break.

With kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Prior', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alex Prior  
Principal

