

2 November 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

It's the end of my first week as Headteacher at Samuel Ward Academy. I'd like to thank all of you who have spoken to me at events at the school, on the phone or by email, and have been so welcoming and encouraging. Even more, I'd like to thank your children, the students of SWA, who have greeted me with such warmth this week.

The Upper Key Stage Play this week was excellent – confidently acted, deftly directed, carefully choreographed and imaginatively staged. I'm sure the rest of the audience would agree with me that it was the kind of quality you'd expect from a professional theatre company, so congratulations to everyone involved in that.

The Sixth Form dressed up with great panache for Halloween on Wednesday. I thought for a moment that the Year 7 boys in the canteen were cheering and waving at me, but it turned out that Spiderman was stood immediately behind me. Luckily, Super Mario and a couple of zombies were on hand to help restore calm.

Parents' Forum

Thank you to everyone who attended the Parents' Forum last half term. I think we all felt it was a genuinely useful meeting.

One topic raised was lunches. Parents are concerned about the range of food on offer and the length of the lunchtime. The current length of the lunchbreak is in part driven by the system of splitting lunches, so that half the school eat lunch at 12.40 and the other half at 1.30. To make a longer lunchbreak, we would have to un-split the lunch. This would increase pressure on seating and serving areas, so may or may not be possible. The feeling of the meeting was almost unanimously that we should investigate un-splitting the lunch break and extending it.

Another issue raised was the use of supply teachers. We are taking what steps we can to fully staff the school with permanent teachers. We have recently appointed two English teachers and two science teachers. I certainly don't want students taught by short term staff wherever I can avoid it.

There were a number of concerns raised about the curriculum. Some parents felt, and I agree, that it needs to offer more choice. We are currently undertaking a curriculum review and will share the outcomes of that as soon as practical. I hope to be able to give an update at the next parents' forum. There were also queries about the target grades we use. I will ensure that we communicate the system we use and the rationale for using it in the next few weeks.

The best way to predict the future... is to create it.

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We all agreed that it would be sensible to share the notes from the Parents' Forum with all parents. There was a request that an annual calendar could be displayed on the website from the start of the school year with important events such as Parents' Evening on it. I absolutely agree and will look into making that happen. There was a request that the systems for purchasing uniform and having it delivered to the school to save on the cost of postage be made much clearer on the website. We talked about the replacement of PR days with parents' evenings. There are many reasons for this, but two main ones. Firstly, the PR day system means that any given student loses three days of teaching in return for three short appointments, which I feel is unacceptable. Secondly, I also feel that it is unacceptable that parents cannot meet with subject teachers to discuss their child's progress in more detail. Decisions like that need to be communicated clearly to parents, and I hope that in future they will be.

Other items of information

We are changing the way that detentions are set for pupils who are given a C3 under the consequences system. Until now, all detentions were served on the same day that the disciplinary issue took place. However, it is sometime difficult to make sure that parents are aware of the detention when it happens later in the school day. To minimise inconvenience to both parents and staff, from Monday 5 November any student given a C3 during period six (after 2.00pm) will serve their detention the next school day.

I'm told that there are infrequent but regular occasions when parents come onto the site without coming through reception first. It is really important that all visitors to the school come to reception and sign in. It allows us to deliver a safeguarding briefing and to issue a visitors lanyard, without which you would be challenged. It also means we know who is on site at any given moment for safety purposes.

Upcoming events

There is a Year 11 Parents' Evening next week, on Wednesday 7 November from 4-7pm. You can book appointments electronically, via the link on the website. If for any reason it isn't working how you'd expect, call the school and we'll look at it with you.

There is a Year 9 Parents' Evening later on this half term, on Thursday 6 December.

The next Parents' Forum meeting will be on Wednesday 12 December at 6.30pm in the canteen. Please feel free to come along and participate.

The Christmas Concert is on Thursday 20 December. If it's anything like summer one I attended, it'll be brilliant. More details to follow.

I want to thank you all for your support and to reiterate how much I value your participation in the school community. Whilst the Parents' Forum is an official route to share your ideas and concerns, there is no need to wait until December if there is something you want to bring to my attention. Please feel free to contact me at the school anytime.

Have a good weekend.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Hunter', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andy Hunter
Headteacher