



Principal: Chris Drew

*From: Chris Drew, Principal*

Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September 2018

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am pleased to be writing to you on a wide range of matters relating to the school and sixth form college. My apologies for the length of this letter, and my thanks to you in advance for taking the time to read it from start to finish. Typically, any letters I issue to parents and carers would be one or two sides of A4, so this is very much an exception! You may wish to take a coffee break in the middle, to keep your energy levels topped up! I would be grateful if all parents, step-parents and carers of your child would read this letter, as far as is practicable in your particular family circumstances.

I have divided my comments into three sections: (a) **The Journey So Far**, (b) **The Here and Now**, and (c) **The Way Ahead**.

There is much to be said, so I will get started....

## **(a) The Journey So Far**

Much has been achieved in bringing a sense of stability and calm to the school over the last eight months or so, and I am keen to express my grateful thanks, once again, for the excellent work of Mr Keith Prytherch and Mr John Kelly, along with the whole staff team. The school is now on an upward trajectory, and it is my responsibility to ensure that upward trajectory continues, with even greater pace and vigour.

### *(a1) GCSE Examinations in Summer 2018*

We are pleased with the GCSE examination results achieved by so many of our Year 11 students. Performance overall was at National Average which, given a number of events in the school's recent history, is most encouraging. The results achieved demonstrate great fortitude and determination on the part of students, parents and staff alike, in a climate of increased rigour of exam board specifications, programmes of study and forms of assessment. 'Value Added' scores were also at National Average and demonstrate a three-year trend of improvement.

### *(a2) A Level Examinations in Summer 2018*

We are also pleased with the A Level examination results achieved by our Year 13 students, with performance overall being well above National Average and results on all key measures being above or well above those achieved in almost all neighbouring schools and sixth form colleges. Again, we are most encouraged by these outcomes. 'Value Added' scores were well above National Average (placing our sixth form college in the second top quintile nationally). All our Year 13 students secured

places at their university of choice, with one student, Alex Vayro, accepting a place at the University of Cambridge.

*(a3) All students now on one site*

For the first time ever, all students from Year 7 through to Year 13 are on the same site. This represents a landmark moment for the school and college in its long and distinguished history, as well as an excellent opportunity for all learners. My whole teaching career has been in 11 to 18 or 11 to 19 schools with sixth forms, and the many benefits such a broad age range on one site bring for both younger and older students alike make the forthcoming months and years both exciting and invigorating.

*(a4) The site team*

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Mr M Shepherd and his site team for undertaking the removal of equipment and resources from the former 'school site' to the 'college site'. They have worked tirelessly over the six-week holiday and deserve our recognition for their toil while many of us were relaxing on a beach somewhere....

*(a5) Improved car parking*

You may have noticed the larger and improved parking facilities for staff and visitors at the front of the site, and we are grateful to North Yorkshire County Council for organising and funding the improvements. We are also thankful to the local residents for their forbearance whilst the work was being undertaken.

*(a6) Conditions improvement bids*

Members of the IEB (the interim governing body) spent a good deal of time over the six-week holiday drawing up a list of proposals for central government funding to improve the condition of the school buildings and facilities. Several conditions improvement bids are currently being considered and I will update you on any next steps as and when progress has been made with any such submissions. We are hopeful but not expectant!

*(a7) A full complement of staff*

I am delighted to report that we have a full complement of teaching and support staff as we embark on this new 2018-19 academic year. A great deal of progress was made in the appointment of a number of staff between April and July, and I am thankful to Mr Prytherch for being comfortable in allowing me to make the majority of these appointments, despite me not being properly "in post" as the new Principal. Interestingly, a number of new staff are colleagues whom I have worked with for a number of years in my previous Headship, and I can assure you that they are teachers and leaders of the very highest quality. They are already starting to have a positive impact on teaching and learning, and they are starting to settle in well with the rest of the staff team.

*(a8) Senior Leadership Team*

I have been able to build a Senior Leadership Team (SLT) around me that is of high quality and that has a healthy balance between experience and youth. Several members of the SLT will already be known to you (Mrs S Bell, Ms R Mills, Mrs A Cox and Mrs A Wilson) and several members will most likely be unknown to you at present (Mrs V Rahn, Mr J Stewart and Mr S Smart, along with Mr C Brown as a visiting member). I will ensure that a detailed description of each SLT member's role and key responsibilities is added to the school website in the coming days for you to study at your leisure.

*(a9) SLT links*

As is good practice in very many schools nowadays, each member of the SLT is responsible for the oversight of one or more academic faculties / departments. For example, the English and mathematics departments are now under the oversight of Mrs V Rahn, Vice Principal. Again, I will ensure that details of the SLT links to each academic faculty / department and to various support services are added to the school website in the coming days.

*(a10) Heads of Faculty / Department and other key roles*

At middle management, we have appointed Mr C Brown to the position of Head of Science and Mrs M Winn to the position of Head of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL). Mr Brown is a former colleague of mine, and Mrs Winn is a former employee of Northallerton school and college that many of you may well remember. Furthermore, we have strengthened the overall leadership and management capacity in the science department and we are in the process of doing the same in the mathematics department at this very moment. The Assistant Head of Science is Mrs C Swales (a former colleague of mine), the Head of Chemistry is now Mrs I Jones, and the Head of Biology is now Mr A Stephenson (a former employee of Northallerton school and college). Regarding the Faculty of Humanities, I have decided to disaggregate the faculty, to provide for clearer lines of accountability in the subjects of history, geography, religious studies (RS) and business studies. Our new special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) is Ms J Shallow, who is currently being ably supported in this vital role by the former SENCO, Ms R Mills. The Learning Support Base Manager remains as Mrs D Fearnside. Our new Examinations Officer is Mrs S Learmonth.

*(a11) Heads of Year and other key roles*

I would like to confirm that the Heads of Year team is as follows: Mrs K Wilson (Head of Year 7), Mr M Stimson (Head of Year 8), Ms D Robson (Head of Year 9), Ms H McCarten (Head of Year 10), Mr T Bunn (Head of Year 11) and Mrs K Redpath (Head of Sixth Form). Mr E Myers remains responsible for Year 6 to 7 Transition. Our Attendance Officer remains as Ms K Thompson. **The school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is Mrs S Bell, Assistant Principal.**

Please forgive me for having quoted a long list of names to you, but I am keen for you to be aware of the members of staff holding these key positions, so you know who would be best to contact should there be a vital matter that you need to raise.

**(b) The Here and Now**

*(b1) The start of term*

For the most part, the start of term has gone smoothly, with the exception of break and lunchtime arrangements, which I will comment on below. In terms of tutor time and taught lessons, it is evident that very many of our students are keen to approach their studies with energy, enthusiasm and commitment. It is also clear to me that the school has a fully committed and determined team of teaching and support staff, and that very many parents are supportive of the school and college succeeding and thriving. This is a very good place for me to start as your new Principal, with so many people, younger and older, wanting to throw their weight behind the changes and improvements that I and the Senior Leadership Team intend to bring about.

For your reassurance, I am not the sort of Principal who makes changes for the sake of it, or does so for dramatic effect. I only tend to make changes when it is clear that they are needed, and any such changes that are proposed would be considered carefully as to their likely impact.

That said, we know that we did not get off to a good start with our new arrangements for morning break and lunchtimes. In fact, to be blunt, we launched a system that was not satisfactory, for which I and the senior staff apologise. Queuing for lunch in the first sitting has taken far too long thus far, and has rightly been a source of frustration for the students in Years 7, 8 and 10 in particular. The second sitting (for the students in Years 9 and 11) has, by contrast, been much smoother and more efficient.

Without wishing to list excuses, we are currently hampered by a main hall and adjacent rooms that are limited in their capacity and by a canteen service and tills system that is not as well configured as we would wish. However, you will be pleased to learn that a second, improved iteration of the break and lunchtimes arrangements is being worked on as I type, and will be launched during next week (w/b 17<sup>th</sup> September). We fully expect it to be an improvement for everyone and we will be seeking students' and staff views as to its effectiveness going forward. We will keep you posted on this.

### *(b2) Student conduct and behaviour in some mathematics lessons*

Although the vast majority of our students have already demonstrated that they are more than capable of good to excellent conduct and behaviour in very many lessons, I and the senior team have noticed that this is less the case in some mathematics lessons. It may be that there are historical reasons for this, but some students seem to think that going to their maths lessons is an opportunity for a poor attitude and/or a poor work ethic.

It goes without saying that mathematics is a vital subject for all students and their future employment prospects, so I would encourage you to discuss with your child their own experiences in maths lessons so far in this new term. If you have any comments or observations you wish to make, please do not hesitate to send them by email to 'enquiries' at the school and these will be forwarded to Mrs V Rahn, Vice Principal, in her capacity as SLT link for the mathematics department. Mrs Rahn is currently working with the department's leadership and team of classroom teachers on a strategy for improvement where it is clear that students' conduct and behaviour in certain maths lessons is below our expected standards, and your input would be invaluable to this process. I would also be grateful if you could impress on your child the vital importance of their excellent conduct and behaviour in all lessons, and specifically in maths.

### *(b3) Attendance matters*

Please could I remind all parents and carers that you need to **ring the school each day** that your child is absent from school. Only one phone call for more than one day's absence is not sufficient for us to meet our legal requirements on safeguarding and recordkeeping.

In terms of me setting out my expectations clearly, I have said to all students that they need to be attending school **every day of the 190 school days** in the academic year, barring serious illness. I have also reminded them that they get 175 days off school in the calendar year (weekends, holidays etc), which is a good trade! Every school day counts and there is no reason for essential school days to be missed or squandered, so your fulsome support on this matter will count for a great deal. I value your child's education so highly that I do not want them to miss even a day of school or even a lesson. I would hope that you feel the same.

As far as the taking of term time holidays is concerned, my stance is simple: please would all parents and carers ensure they only take family holidays during the 13 weeks of school holiday in the year and **not during term time at all**. Any and all requests for term time holidays will therefore be declined as a matter of course, unless I consider it to be for the most exceptional of reasons.

It may be that some families have got into the habit of taking family holidays during term time, and there may be a prevailing view that the school doesn't mind too much. Let me be clear, respectfully, that the opposite is true – certainly from this point forward.

*(b4) The start of each school day*

Please would you impress on your child that they need to ensure they are on the school and college site **by 8:40am at the latest**. This allows sufficient time for students to get to tutor time or assembly in readiness for morning registration. Those students who arrive late to school will find themselves in receipt of a sanction.

*(b5) The Reading Room*

The Library Classroom has been renamed 'The Reading Room', and Year 7 students are welcome to visit The Reading Room between 8:00am and 8:40am before school, and during Year 7 break and lunchtime. This provision will be supervised, and excellent behaviour is expected at all times. We may extend this provision to other year groups in the fullness of time, as space and resource permits. We will keep you posted on this.

*(b6) After school detentions and the prospect of Saturday detentions*

After school detentions are being reinstated from this week, and will be supervised by Faculty / Department staff and senior staff. Those students who choose not to attend their after school detention will face the prospect of a Saturday morning detention, which will be supervised by myself and a rota of senior staff. Those students attending Saturday morning detention will be required to arrive in full school uniform and they will be given either community tasks or academic study to do. Parents and carers of a certain age will understand why Saturday morning detentions will be nicknamed "The Breakfast Club".

*(b7) School uniform*

Most students are wearing their school uniform well and they look really smart. I would remind parents and carers that school shoes need to be plain, black and polishable, and must not be black trainers or trainer-style shoes. Students are well aware of the rules on jewellery and we would ask them to ensure they abide by these rules at all times. It is clear that some female students wear their skirts properly but that others wear their skirts too short – so I have asked Mrs V Rahn, Vice Principal, to consider this matter further and to propose a suitable way forward, which may involve a change to the style of skirt in the fullness of time. We will endeavour to give you plenty of notice, should any change to the style of skirt be considered necessary.

*(b8) "The A, B, C"*

I have introduced to all students the concept of focusing on three key aspects of school life in particular – '**A**' for **Attendance**, '**B**' for **Behaviour** and '**C**' for **Commitment**. If each student focuses on their own excellent attendance at school, their own excellent behaviour in lessons and around school, and their own excellent commitment to their schoolwork and their homework, then they will make great strides in all that can be achieved during their time with us. Messages such as these will be further explored and developed in year group assemblies and in tutor time.

*(b9) The five essential qualities of a great teacher*

On the All Staff Training Day on Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September, I shared at some length with staff about what I consider to be the five essential qualities of a great teacher. After much deliberation, I have concluded that they are as follows: **Professionalism, Care, Rapport, Interest and Enthusiasm**. These are the qualities, therefore, that we as a school will be seeking to develop further amongst all our teaching staff in all subjects, wherever necessary, over the weeks and months to come.

*(b10) Introduction of the SAIL curriculum in Year 7*

We are delighted to be introducing the SAIL curriculum in Year 7. SAIL stands for 'Student Agency In Learning', and it is a model of teaching and learning that is widespread in Sweden – one of the highest performing education systems in the world. Several of our key staff have already been involved in the introduction and development of SAIL in other successful schools, and a large number of Northallerton staff have now undertaken initial induction and training. Year 7 teachers and Form Tutors will play a vital role in the development of SAIL across the school, and from this point forward Year 7 Form Tutors are to be known as 'Year 7 Base Coaches' as they will be 'coaching' their tutees through the implementation of the SAIL curriculum and through the academic year.

If you wish to find out more about SAIL, please do not hesitate to approach Mrs A Cox, Senior Teacher, or Mrs V Rahn, Vice Principal, in the first instance. I had the pleasure of attending the national SAIL Conference in June and found it to be most enlightening and informative.

*(b11) Habits of Mind*

Some of you may remember the Habits of Mind programme that used to be in place at Allertonshire Middle School several years ago, prior to the merger. Allertonshire staff who thought highly of Habits of Mind have advocated it to me, and I am convinced as to its value. Therefore, the senior team will be working with Faculties / Departments on promoting and developing Habits of Mind amongst our students in lessons and in schemes of work and programmes of study. There are 16 Habits of Mind altogether, although Ms R Mills (who has responsibility for teaching and learning across the whole school) is currently determining which of the 16 Habits we are going to focus on first as a whole school over the course of this academic year. If all of this seems like a mystery to you, then simply look for the "Habits of Mind poster" in Google Images and have a read. In essence, it is a programme that helps students to think more about how they think, and to learn more about how they learn.

*(b12) Cover Supervisors*

I am aware that many parents are keen that we reduce our reliance on supply agency staff whenever there is an absence of our own member of teaching staff due to illness. To that end, we have appointed two Cover Supervisors onto our staff team, to ensure that a "known face" is in front of the students as much as possible. Our own Cover Supervisors will also know the school and the systems and procedures we have in place, so our students will get to enjoy a more consistent approach to teaching and learning in the classroom as a result.

*(b13) Special Assemblies on Fridays*

Each Friday morning during tutor time, I will be meeting with any students who have had to be removed from any lessons during that week. On the Friday just gone, I met with 32 such students, out of a total student population of over 1,100. In these Friday assemblies, I will be seeking to understand why a handful of students appear to think it is OK to disrupt the learning of others and to make life

difficult for the teacher. I will also be exploring, with the pastoral team, methods by which such attitudes can be modified and improved over time. I will keep you posted on this, as necessary.

### **(c) The Way Ahead**

There is so much I want to say about this exciting next chapter for Northallerton school and college, but I will restrain myself by saying just a few things:

#### *(c1) Extra-curricular programme*

It is clear that the school's extra-curricular programme has historically been strong, rich and varied, but that a good deal has dwindled in recent times. A cornerstone of my vision for the school and college is to see the extra-curricular provision of clubs, societies, trip and visits regain a sense of momentum and to grow over time. This will be a steady process that will take place over the weeks and months to come.

#### *(c2) House system*

In a number of schools I have worked in over the years, a vibrant House system has been a particularly enjoyable and fulfilling aspect of school life. I am keen to introduce (or reintroduce) a House system at Northallerton school and college, where Houses compete in a range of sporting and non-sporting activities throughout the year, with the winning House being awarded the House Cup at the very end of the year.

I would like our own students to come up with the names of **four** proposed new Houses, and for these suggestions for our new House names to be submitted to me for consideration **by 3pm on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September**. All suggestions should be handed in to my PA, Mrs Louise Bramley, by the deadline given.

#### *(c3) Reward Trips*

For the many well behaved and hardworking students at the school, we would like to organise Reward Trips towards the end of the year. The cost of these trips would typically be met by parents and carers, and each trip would take place on a chosen Saturday in the months of June and July. My current thinking is as follows: Year 7 – Lightwater Valley, Year 8 – Lightwater Valley, Year 9 – Flamingo Land, Year 10 – Flamingo Land, Year 11 – Alton Towers, Sixth Form – Alton Towers. However, and importantly, only students with a record of good conduct and behaviour will be permitted on these trips. Students who have demonstrated poor conduct and behaviour over time will find themselves without an invite.

#### *(c4) Year 11 Prom and Year 13 Leavers' Dinner*

These two key events will take place towards the end of the academic year. However, and importantly, only students with a record of good conduct and behaviour will be permitted to attend. Students who have demonstrated poor conduct and behaviour over time will find themselves without an invite.

#### *(c5) Positions of Responsibility*

Many good and outstanding schools choose to place students from all year groups in positions of responsibility, and that is my intention at Northallerton. In the coming weeks, I will be seeking nominations and applications for the following:

- Head Boy, Deputy Head Boy, Head Girl, Deputy Head Girl
- Sixth Form Prefects
- Heads of Year 11 (one male and one female)
- Year 11 Prefects
- Year 10 Monitors, Year 9 Monitors, Year 8 Monitors, Year 8 Librarians
- Year 7 SAIL Ambassadors, Year 7 Classroom Champions, Year 7 Librarians
- House Captains and House Vice Captains (...if we decide to proceed with a House system)

...and this list may well be added to in the months and years to come.

*(c6) Mobile Phone Policy*

You will no doubt have read my recent letter on the school's updated Mobile Phone Policy. I would like to thank the vast majority of our students who have responded very well to its implementation. Only a handful of students had their phones confiscated in the first week of term, which is a very encouraging sign.

*(c7) Inappropriate, Foul and Abusive Language Policy*

The vast majority of our students know what language to use in particular circumstances, but to my surprise we had a handful of situations in the first week of term when a small number of individual students chose to use inappropriate, foul or abusive language towards members of staff, either directly or muttered under their breath. You will agree with me, I'm sure, that no member of staff should have to tolerate such behaviour. My senior team and I will therefore be reviewing existing policies on this matter and will be issuing an amended policy, if we feel it necessary, in the coming days. This would then be communicated in a separate letter to parents and carers.

*(c8) Use of planners*

We would urge your child to ensure they use their planner on a daily basis, not least to write in the details of any homework they are given. Writing down the details of homework is typically a much more reliable method than simply committing it to memory or writing it on a loose piece of paper.

*(c9) The setting up of a Parents' Views Group that will focus on students' conduct and behaviour*

When I met with a large number of parents and carers in several "open house" meetings in late June, I said that I was wanting to set up a Parents' Views Group, that would meet informally once a month, where we would discuss views and any concerns relating to students' conduct and behaviour in school. The first of these meetings has been set for **6pm on Monday 17<sup>th</sup> September** and any parent / carer who wishes to attend is very welcome. Such a meeting will allow parents to engage directly with me on these vital matters, and for me to be in receipt of "live" and accurate information from you. Whether the numbers attending are large or small, I very much hope we have a productive and constructive first meeting, which will set the right tone for the year.

*(c10) Parents' Survey*

At some point this week, if your child is in **Year 8 or Year 10**, they will be issued with a Parents' Survey for you to complete. I would ask for as many completed surveys as possible please, so we can build up an accurate picture of parents' and carers' views at the start of this academic year. Please could all completed surveys be **handed in to Reception by 3:30pm on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> September** at the latest.

*(c11) Pupil Premium Strategy*

If any parent or carer wishes to discuss the school's strategy in relation to our students who are eligible for Pupil Premium, please do not hesitate to contact Mr C Smart, Assistant Principal, in the first instance.

*(c12) First point of contact concerning your child*

As you will already be aware, the first point of contact for you on any day to day matter concerning your child needs to be their Form Tutor or Year 7 Base Coach. I would ask that parents do not circumvent the system by going straight to the Head of Year, as they may well then ask you to contact the Form Tutor first to ensure they are made aware of the matter(s) you wish to raise.

*(c13) Response time of Form Tutors and Heads of Year*

My expectation is that any query you raise with the school is acknowledged promptly, ideally within 24 hours, and that a solution is found as swiftly as possible thereafter. We are a large and busy school and sometimes things can get delayed or even missed, but my expectation is that parents and carers should find themselves enjoying a high level of satisfaction with the swiftness and quality of our response as a school to you.

*(c14) How to arrange a meeting with the Principal*

I am very happy to meet with parents or carers to discuss any issues or concerns that you may have, but we will be operating a bookable appointment system (much like exists in many doctors' surgeries). Any parent wishing to meet with me should contact my PA, Louise Bramley, in the first instance and she will arrange a time for us to meet. *Her working hours are 9am to 3pm Monday to Thursday (but 9am to 5pm on Wednesday) each week during term time.* Mrs Bramley has set aside time in my diary each week for any such appointments to take place. That said, if she or I feel the matter you wish to raise would be better served (and perhaps more quickly served) by you meeting with a member of the senior leadership team or a member of the pastoral team instead, then we may direct your concern to the most appropriate member of staff and advise you accordingly.

*(c15) Year 11 students – a critical year!*

Clearly, Year 11 is a critical year, with GCSE Trial Examinations and then Public Examinations looming on the horizon. Mrs V Rahn, Vice Principal, will therefore be issuing a letter to all parents and carers of children in Year 11, detailing key dates for such examinations, revision sessions, and the like. This letter will be issued to you in the coming days.

*(c16) Sixth Form Open Evening and Year 6 Open Evening*

This year, we will be running these two important events on the same evening, **Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2018**, with the following timings:

The **Year 6 Open Evening** will run from **4:30pm to 6:30pm**.

The Principal will be speaking three times on that evening (at 4:30pm, 5:15pm and 6pm).

The **Sixth Form Open Evening** will then run from **7pm to 8:30pm**.

*(c17) Annual Awards Evening*

The school's annual **Awards Evening** will be held on **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2018 from 7pm to 9pm at the Hambleton Forum**. It would be good for you to save this date in your diary.

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Wow! We made it to the end! Thank you so much for reading this letter right through. There are still a few more things I am keen to bring to your attention, so there may be a (much shorter!) part two to this letter in the coming days or weeks.

I trust you sense that the winds of change and improvement are blowing through the school and college, for the benefit of every young person and family that we serve in Northallerton and beyond. We have some way to go, but a very encouraging start has certainly been made.

I wish you and your family every happiness and success for the term and year ahead.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Drew, Principal