



Headteacher's Update

24th January 2025

Dear Parents and Carers,

Thank you for your continued support in terms of uniform, attendance, and homework. We know we have exacting standards but it is inspiring to see so many of our students week in and week out raise their game to meet our River benchmarks.

Attendance

Attendance is strong although it was a little lower this week than we would like and whilst I sympathise that absence is sometimes appropriate and necessary it is important to ensure that school is a priority. Therefore, with our 95% target in mind, there will be some letters sent home next week that will continue to raise awareness of attendance if your son or daughter is below our target attendance of 95%.

Skirts

Similarly, I know a few of you have been contacted regarding skirt lengths and asking you to purchase a longer skirt (and much of this stems from students growing since September) as we ask that the skirt comes to the knee. Our uniform is a matter of pride and the River community always stand out, but also it is important the students dress appropriately for school, and I do not feel noticeably short skirts fit into this category.

Homework

With our new approach to homework being implemented this week, it has been interesting to see how many students have missed deadlines. As I write this it is about 8 students a day (around 5%) who have had to stay late to complete work that was outstanding which is most encouraging and a sign that our values of excellence and determination are being lived by the students. One or two students have arrived at lessons with a few scrawled marks and little effort being put into their work and therefore their work is incomplete, so they have also had to stay late to re-do their work. In all cases, as we have said previously, the homework is designed to support the lessons, consolidate knowledge and boost skills and I am so pleased that almost all the students are absolutely smashing it with these set tasks.

Sparx Reader

We have had a hugely successful week of Sparx Reader with students. Thank you for all your support in encouraging them to engage with this. At the time of writing, we are on track for a very high

completion rate which is fantastic to see. We know how important reading is and Sparx Reader will help ensure that no child is left behind. Some students really have gone over and above with their reading already. Rosalind, Maya, Likitha and Alyssa have all read over 7000 words already (Alyssa is currently top of the leaderboard having done 21 hours of careful reading!). As a year group, students have already done over 200 hours of reading on Sparx and this will be even higher by the end of the week.

Holocaust Memorial Day

Our assembly this week was delivered magnificently by Miss Angell, on the topic of Holocaust Remembrance Day which falls next week. She gave a wonderful account of Nicholas Winton, a Maidenhead resident, who rescued over 600 young Jewish children from Prague on the eve of World War Two. It was a sobering tale of heroism in the face of adversity and bigotry, but one I wanted the students to hear. There are so many narratives and incidences of discrimination and intolerance in the world at the moment and this story was a strong antidote to those narratives and our values of community and empathy were writ large across the presentation. An attachment to the assembly is enclosed in this e-mail if any families want to look at and discuss.

The students have also all been told about our online event happening at the end of school on Thursday where they will be able to hear a Holocaust survivor being interviewed in a specially recorded live event for younger secondary children. This is an event not to be missed and Miss Angell has the sign up details on her doorway.

Parent Open Morning and visits

We had a Year 7 Parent Open Morning on Wednesday, and we had around 30 attendees. I was thrilled by what our visitors saw in terms of consistency, participation, and alignment as they went from class to class. Our students are learning and always progressing, and our quiet rooms give them chance to cognitively challenge themselves. However, we also make sure there is also time to have fun, be recognised for your effort and celebrate their part in the River community.

Next Wednesday we have the CEO of the City of London Academies Trust visiting us as he has heard much about our offer and wants to see it for himself.

PE and sports teams

Our sports teams are about to embark on their term's fixtures next week with Highdown coming across for two netball fixtures. I know Ms Moore feels she has a strong crop of players so it will be exciting to see their progress across the league season. Mr Clare has over 30 boys attending football each week and their fixtures begin soon with the Reading and District League. Lastly, on this matter it was excellent to see 11 boys make their way across to Newbury Showground on Saturday for the Berkshire Schools Cross Country Championships. We had the second biggest team of



all the schools in that race and were the only Reading school represented. A huge thanks to Mr Clare for his time on this event but also for everyone involved in making River academy such a vibrant sporting community.

House Events

Today sees the final of our latest House event, the Mathletes Challenge, with the 180 students whittled down to 6 finalists and the big event taking place as a part of the Celebration Assembly. In addition, congratulations to Tymon Swiss who won our recent House photography with a beautiful alpine scene. As you can see, we have constructed a strong calendar of sporting, academic and creative events linked to our House system, and it is brilliant to observe how the students are buying into this.

Recruitment

Our teaching jobs have just gone live for next year. Please see the link below and please forward to anyone you feel would both be interested and is suitable for the job in hand. On this theme we appointed a brilliant new Head of Year for next year who was attracted to the post because of our approach to teaching and learning which matches his own at a top London state school

[River Academy - Vacancies](#)

INSET days

We have two INSET days coming up which I just wanted to make sure you have in the family calendar. The first is on Friday 28th February which is the week after half term and the second is on Friday April 4th.

Safeguarding

A reminder that our Child Protection and Safeguarding policy can be found at this link on the River Academy website: [River Academy - Child Protection and Safeguarding](#)





Headteacher's Award

I'll leave you with a picture of Shakira, who was my Headteacher's Award winner for last week. She thoroughly deserved it for her all-round excellence, but I am showing the image as she radiates so much pride in her achievement, and it was/is a pleasure to see.

Take care and have a wonderful weekend.

Andy Hartley
Headteacher

Yours sincerely,

Headteacher