



RIVER ACADEMY

News Stream

Headteacher Update



Whilst I have been appointed as the Headteacher of River Academy for a few months now, the project has really accelerated since I took the role on full time in January, in the run up to opening in September 2024.

It has been an extremely exciting, yet odd (no students and no staff!) experience and over the last few weeks I have been working as a part of a small Maiden Erlegh Trust team pulling together the many aspects of the new school. As well as the staffing and the site development we have been compiling policies, meeting the Department for Education, meeting local community groups and leaders, recruiting a governing body, building budgets, developing school systems, establishing the curriculum and publicising the project! Our recent meeting with the Department for Education (as part of the pre-opening process for all new free schools) was an exacting two hours as they scrutinised our plans, policies and procedures but was also incredibly reassuring as we received positive feedback about the school and what we intend to do.

One of our first tasks is to make sure we have our curriculum, behaviour systems, procedures and protocols in place ready for September. Whilst the specifics will be cemented over the next few months as more staff join the team, we are certain to be focused on elevated levels of participation and positive engagement in lessons. We also want all students to feel a pride in their achievements and will be holding a short assembly each Friday afternoon to celebrate all that has gone well in the week. Our Trust value of **'Aim High'** and school values of **'determination'** and **'excellence'** will be writ large over each and every one of these events. The aim is that students leave each week with a smile on their face, and they see school as a place where they feel safe and there is a genuine joy at being a part of the River Academy community.

In terms of local community groups, it has been a pleasure to meet the likes of Reading Rowing Club, Steve McBride (General Manager of Rivermead Leisure Centre), Readipop music studios and the Soulscape Lounge project. All these groups have been keen to engage with the River Academy project offering us facilities and time as a part of their commitment to enriching the local community. This is exciting and dovetails with our Electives programme on a Wednesday when all the students will participate in an extra-curricular activity from a wide menu of options. It is also my mission to ensure that the school and local community serve *each other*, enhancing the lives of the people we serve. These meetings are very much part of our Trust value of **'Working together'** and our school values of **'community'**, **'empathy'** and **'respect'**.



We hope to have more news on our Year 7 cohort to share in the next few weeks but in the background we have been compiling postcode maps of our applicants, talking to Reading Buses about potential school routes and looking at cycle paths, school crossings and pathways so that our students can arrive at school safely.



Another task has been the establishment of a strong School Advisory Board (the governing body). It is important that the expertise of the Maiden Erlegh Trust Board and the School Advisory Board are utilised to hold my team to account for our work. I am pleased to say that we already have two very experienced local senior school leaders (including one secondary headteacher) and two co-opted members who work in industry. My quest, after Year 7 places are accepted, will be to look for potential parent members so that the SAB can be up and running in September. If anyone is interested, please do e-mail Maia Hill, the Clerk to the Maiden Erlegh Trust Board on m.hill@maidenerleghtrust.org.

I have also been investigating options for Outdoor Education for our first cohort of River Academy students. I am a firm believer in the benefits of outdoor learning, and I think much benefit can be gained from the controlled risk taking that these experiences engender. Therefore, I have been speaking to The Outward Bound Trust for residential trips along with the Eyot Centre in Henley for potential day experiences.



I hope you can see from this small selection from my diary that there is so much exciting work taking place in preparation for our grand opening in September and that we, in the River Academy team, are incredibly excited to be involved in this project.



Andy Hartley
Principle Designate

Introducing Mrs Billingham



We would like to welcome Laura Billingham, as our new Deputy Headteacher. Laura is currently at The Hurst School in Tadley and has a wealth of experience in leading curriculum development, subject leadership and teaching and learning.

In a very strong field, Laura impressed everyone on the interview day with a combination of her technical knowledge, wide understanding of education and the current issues in this sector, her passion for the River Academy project and her positive personality.

Welcome aboard Laura!

Project Update



Our latest site visit was on 23 January and we were really excited to see the progress made despite the really bad weather we have experienced over the last few weeks.

A lot of progress has been made on the sportshall, which was just a timber frame on our previous visit in November and the main school building is now water-tight which means that as we focus on the internals, progress is no longer weather dependent.



All of the internal wall colours and finishes have now been chosen and we are in the process of finalising the location of our feature walls. In line with the colours on the outside of the building, these will be a mixture of blue, yellow and green. It is so exciting that the majority of the work will now be focussed on the inside of the building and that we are now so close to realising the plans we have seen on paper for the past few years! We are on target and counting down to the handover of the building in July.



Julie Foster
Head of School Operations

Introducing Mrs Clarke



We are thrilled to announce Becky Clarke was appointed as Assistant Headteacher. Becky will lead our SEND department, oversee our Additional Resource Base and act as Designated Safeguarding Lead.

Becky comes to the River Academy project after over 8 years at Maiden Erlegh School in Reading where she has been SENCO and has performed the role with zest, zeal, and great aplomb at all times. Throughout the interview process Becky demonstrated her knowledge of all things SEND, her love of working with young people, her ability to lead change and get results. Becky, we are delighted you are on Team River!



CGI School Fly-through

Bowmer and Kirkland have supplied a CGI fly-through of our new school giving us the opportunity to see exactly what River Academy will look like when it opens in September.

To access it, please click on the **play button** below.



PE kit

We have been working hard with our uniform suppliers to design a practical and affordable PE kit to support our culture of high expectations about dress and appearance. There will be minimal branded items with most items available on the high street.

The full uniform list and PE kit will be available on our website in due course and also through our suppliers, Stevensons.



Vacancies

Schools run by Maiden Erlegh Trust attract the highest calibre of staff and governors and we will be looking for the brightest and best to work for the benefit of the students.

If you think you can offer something special, please get in touch by sending an expression of interest to: **recruitment@maidenerleghtrust.org**.

Vacancies can be found on the website **HERE** or by scanning the **QR code**.



Where to find us?



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If you would like to keep up to date with the progress being made at River Academy, follow us on our social media platforms.

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www.river-academy.co.uk



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