



Headteacher's Update

15 May 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Meningitis

I am aware you were sent an email from myself earlier today regarding the meningitis outbreak. I was in a meeting, along with headteachers from across the borough, this morning and led by the Director of Public Health. It is worth re-iterating that the risk of transmission is incredibly low, and everyone considered to be a close contact has been contacted and is being offered preventative antibiotics by the UK Health Security Agency. To be clear, as far as we are aware this does not include any River Academy families.

A close contact is defined as:

- Household members
- People sharing sleeping accommodation
- Intimate partners (e.g. kissing)
- In some circumstances, very close social groups with repeated contact

The risk appears to be much greater in older teenagers but for all children, the advice is that vaccination is the most effective way of protecting your child and please contact your GP surgery if you need to get this done.

Bike theft

Sadly, we were visited by a gang of bike thieves on Thursday who scaled the fence before taking a bike. This gang have been going around many local schools recently. Remarkably, Mr Trinder and Mr Woodfine recovered the bike following a search of the bushes beyond Rivermead. Moving forwards, to reduce the risk, please make sure your child locks their bike when they bring their bike to school. We have moved all the unlocked bikes to an indoor space today but will not be able to do this every day. We are also about to increase our fencing in the gate to Rivermead where the thieves entered the site, but this will take a few days to install.

Mastery Showcase Week



I have been absolutely delighted with our students this week. They have arrived at school equipped with flashcards, knowledge organisers, and books full of notes, alongside incredibly positive attitudes.

It has been fantastic to see them in the canteen and LRC before school, testing one another, discussing topics enthusiastically, and reflecting carefully on previous papers. They have also conducted themselves exceptionally well in the exam hall, recognising that these assessments are a wonderful opportunity to *“show up and show off,”* as Mrs Billingham often says.

Study sessions have been characterised by real dedication and hard work, with students applying themselves impressively. The metacognitive skill of effective revision is something many GCSE students find challenging, so I am especially proud that our Year 7 and 8 students are already developing these habits so well.

Results will be revealed in assemblies after half term, and I am sure there will be much to celebrate.

UK Junior Maths Challenge Results



Two weeks ago, all our Set 1 mathematicians took part in the UK Junior Maths Challenge. This competition is completed by the most able Year 7 and 8 students across the country, and most schools achieve a number of awards.

However, I am both delighted and incredibly proud to share that River Academy achieved 91 awards out of 130 participants. This is an outstanding accomplishment and includes 9 Gold awards, with 5 students progressing to the next round of the challenge.



We will present awards to students next week, but this achievement is yet another benchmark for River Academy. A cohort that entered with average SAT outcomes has performed at the very highest level with a set of results that rival some of the very best schools in the country.

Attendance

Thank you for your continued support with attendance over the past few weeks. Our attendance has been almost 97% this week, which is exceptional. This reflects the strong partnership between school, families, and students in supporting success.

However, I also attach a link to an interesting article I read in Schools Week about the close and

important link between a good sleep routine and attendance at school. As a parent it is definitely worth having a read!

[Good sleep hygiene is crucial to boosting attendance](#)

Sparx

Our success in the Maths Challenge comes as no surprise. For six consecutive weeks, River Academy has ranked No. 1 school in the country for Maths and Reader on Sparx.



This is a remarkable achievement. Once again, I would like to extend my thanks to families for ensuring that students consistently meet deadlines and remain fully engaged, giving every learner the opportunity to succeed.

Vaping

Last week, I had to suspend a student for selling vapes to another student. In addition, another student received an internal suspension for possession of a vape on school premises.

Our behaviour policy is very clear: vapes are prohibited items. Possession in school will result in a Level 3 sanction, such as suspension or a Fixed Term Transfer (FTT) to another school for a day.

Vaping is a challenge faced by many secondary schools. At River Academy, we address this proactively through education in workshops, assemblies and Personal Development lessons. As you may be aware, there are currently no long-term studies on the effects of vaping on adolescent health. Many products contain potentially harmful chemicals and are produced in unregulated environments, meaning there could be serious long-term consequences for young people.

The vapes involved in this incident were purchased from a shop in town (located in "Smelly Alley") by students aged just 12.

We strongly encourage you to speak with your child about vaping. Please also take a moment to check bags and blazer pockets to ensure no prohibited items are being brought into school or are about their person.

As part of our follow-up actions and in line with our behaviour policy, we will be conducting targeted bag searches where there are reasonable suspicions and using a detection wand to identify devices.

We also ask that you remain aware of any purchases your child may be making, or items they may be holding on behalf of others.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support.

Best wishes,

A. Hartley

Andy Hartley

Headteacher