

Headteacher's Update

17 July 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope everybody has had a good week. Thankfully, temperatures have been a little cooler and, whilst still warm, the school building has remained largely pleasant, with classrooms not becoming too stuffy.

I am delighted to share some fantastic news regarding the recent assessments completed by our students. Over the last few weeks, all students have undertaken standardised reading assessments which measure progress from the beginning to the end of the academic year.

For **Year 7**, students have moved from the **50th percentile to the 66th percentile**, demonstrating very strong progress over the course of the year. Even more impressively, our **Year 8 students** have moved from the **50th percentile at the start of Year 7 to the 75th percentile by the end of Year 8**. This is exceptional progress and is particularly noteworthy given the levels of deprivation within our pupil intake.

In addition, all Year 8 students recently completed a national mathematics assessment. Once again, I am delighted to report that students have moved from the **50th percentile at the start of Year 7 to the 75th percentile by the end of Year 8**.

This collective success is extremely heartening and underlines the effectiveness of our **Habits of Learning**, our approach to homework, and our determination that no student should fall behind. I am particularly pleased when looking at progress by subgroup. Our **English as an Additional Language students**, **students eligible for Free School Meals**, and our **SEND students** have all made excellent progress. This once again demonstrates how well we include all students at River Academy, ensuring that every child is fully involved in learning, makes strong progress, and is given the very best chance of success in life.

Sports Day

On Wednesday, we held our annual Sports Day, and it was an absolute pleasure.



Having worked in a number of schools as an Assistant Head, Deputy Head and Headteacher, I know that Sports Day can sometimes become a day of crowd control. At River Academy, however, it is something very different. Our students were respectful, calm and supportive throughout the day. They listened carefully, stayed in the correct areas and, most importantly, cheered, applauded and encouraged one another to do their very best.

We scheduled the track events during Period 1 so that students and staff could enjoy the cooler part of the day. It was wonderful to watch students speed around the track and give everything they had in their races.

This was followed by two hours of field events, including the shot put, javelin, discus, 400 metres, high jump and standing long jump. Students performed incredibly well in all events, with some particularly impressive throws and jumps throughout the afternoon.

As you will see from the photographs, everyone gave their very best — including the staff in the staff relay at the end of the track session. Personally, I was gutted that my team finished second!



The Brilliant Club Graduation

Fourteen of our students took part in **The Brilliant Club** this year. This programme supports students who have no family history of university attendance and challenges them to complete a 2,000-word dissertation under the guidance of a PhD tutor.

On Tuesday, students travelled to **University College London** for their graduation ceremony. It was a fantastic day, and the students represented the school impeccably both on the train and throughout the event itself.



Particular congratulations go to **Sesan**, who achieved a **First** for his dissertation. However, every one of our students achieved at least an **Honours** classification, which is a tremendous achievement and one of which they should be hugely proud.

PGL Residential

This weekend, around 100 Year 7 students will be attending our PGL residential at **PGL Liddington**. The trip promises to be full of adventure, teamwork and fun, and I hope everyone has a wonderful experience.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the staff who are giving up their own weekend at the end of a very long academic year to make this opportunity possible for our students.

Attendance

Finally, thank you for your continued support. Our attendance remains at **95.5% for the year**, which is an excellent achievement.

Although we are approaching the summer holidays, learning continues right to the end of term. At River Academy, lessons remain purposeful and productive; there are no "video lessons" here. Our staff continue to work hard to ensure every lesson counts and gives students the maximum opportunity for success.

With this in mind, please continue sending your son or daughter into school for the final two and a half days of term.

A reminder that **school finishes at 12:30pm on Wednesday.**

Uniform Reminder

Can I also ask all parents of girls to take a moment over the summer to check skirt length ahead of September. As a reminder, school skirts should sit **just above the knee.**

We do keep a supply of longer skirts in school and any student whose skirt is shorter than our uniform expectation will be asked to change into one of these during the school day.

The summer holiday is often an excellent opportunity to review and replace uniform, particularly as young people tend to grow rapidly during the early years of adolescence. Thank you in advance for your support in ensuring that students return in September ready to meet our uniform expectations.

Farewell and Thank You

Lastly, and with a great deal of sadness, I would like to share that three members of our teaching staff will be leaving us at the end of this term.

Miss Angel

Miss Angel, our Head of Humanities, will be leaving River Academy to take up a promotion. During her time with us, she has made an extraordinary contribution to the school and her impact will continue to be felt for many years to come.

Miss Angel has led the development of outstanding curricula across all of our humanities subjects and has delivered exceptional lessons to our students throughout her time at River. She is an incredibly enthusiastic professional who approaches every challenge with energy, commitment and determination. Indeed, only recently she asked whether she could reference the work of River Academy in three academic articles she has been commissioned to write—a request that I was delighted to approve.

Beyond her classroom and leadership responsibilities, Miss Angel has been the driving force behind our **Silver Programme** for gifted and talented students. Over the course of this year alone, she has organised more than twenty enrichment events, drawing upon her extensive university links to provide our students with lectures and workshops from some of the country's most eminent academics.

I am also deeply grateful for her work supporting our Pupil Premium students. Through initiatives such as **The Brilliant Club**, and through securing funding that enabled a group of students to experience London—many of whom had never travelled to the capital or eaten in a restaurant before—she has consistently worked to broaden horizons and raise aspirations.

Miss Angel is a passionate advocate for social mobility and firmly believes that every child, regardless

of background, deserves the opportunity to excel and become an active and engaged citizen. While we are incredibly sorry to see her leave, we are also immensely proud that she has secured such a well-deserved promotion. River Academy's loss is certainly Denfield School's gain, and we wish her every success in the future.

Mr Woodfine

Mr Woodfine will also be leaving us at the end of term.

Having joined the school in September 2025, he has decided to return to Suffolk to be closer to his family. During his time at River, he has made a significant contribution to the Geography Department, inspiring many students to develop a genuine love of the subject.

Mr Woodfine's lessons have been characterised by creativity, ambition and some particularly brave curriculum choices which have proved incredibly popular with students. He has also been a wonderfully supportive colleague—generous with his time, approachable and always willing to help others.

The large number of gratitude cards he receives each term is testament to the esteem in which he is held by our students. He will be greatly missed by both staff and pupils alike, and we wish him every happiness and success as he returns to his native Suffolk.

Miss Denton

Finally, Miss Denton will be leaving us next week.

As our Food Technology teacher, Miss Denton has worked with us on a part-time basis and has made an important and lasting contribution to the school. Her greatest legacy will undoubtedly be the innovative ingredients system she introduced, ensuring that all students are able to cook regularly during practical lessons.

In many schools, practical food lessons can inadvertently disadvantage students whose families may struggle to provide ingredients each week. Too often, those students are left completing worksheets while others participate in the practical aspects of the lesson.

Miss Denton was determined that this would not happen at River Academy. Through a combination of school support and parental contributions where appropriate, she established a system whereby ingredients are provided centrally, ensuring that every student can cook, learn and develop practical skills in every lesson. It was a simple idea, but a remarkably powerful one, and a wonderful example of inclusive practice.

Outside education, Miss Denton has developed a number of successful business ventures and social media enterprises and has decided to focus her attention on these full-time. We are incredibly grateful for everything she has done for our students and wish her every success in her future

entrepreneurial endeavours.

On behalf of all of us at River Academy, I would like to thank Miss Angel, Mr Woodfine and Miss Denton for their commitment, dedication and service to our school community. They leave with our gratitude, our respect and our very best wishes for the future.

However, in September I will be welcoming you to our 21 new staff members who will be with us from September.

Piercings During the Summer Holiday

Can I also remind parents that if your son or daughter is planning to have a piercing, it should ideally be done within the first few days of the summer holiday. This allows sufficient time for it to heal and, where necessary, be removed after six weeks so that students can comply with our expectations regarding earrings and other piercings when they return to school.

September Return Arrangements

A reminder that students entering **Year 8 and Year 9 in September** will return to school on **10 September at 9:30am**. Students should not arrive before this time.

This later start allows us to support our new Year 7 students as part of their induction and matriculation process before Year 8 and Year 9 students join us later in the morning.

This is my final newsletter of the academic year.

Thank you for all the support you have given the school throughout the year. On behalf of all the staff at River Academy, I wish you and your families a safe, restful and enjoyable summer break.

We look forward to welcoming you back in September.

Yours faithfully,



Andy Hartley,

Headteacher

