

Headteacher's Update

16th October 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

As we approach the end of a busy half term, there is a real sense of achievement across the school. While the inevitable signs of tiredness are beginning to show amongst both students and staff, what continues to impress me is the positivity, commitment and determination that remain evident throughout our community.

Yesterday morning, I had the pleasure of welcoming Steve Jump, Director of Secondary Education for Maiden Erlegh Trust, to River Academy. Together we visited lessons across the school, focusing on participation, engagement and ensuring that every student was making the most of every learning opportunity. It was a genuine pleasure to showcase our school. In Maths, Geography and Food Technology, to name just three subjects, students were fully immersed in their learning, working hard, embracing challenges and striving to make progress.



RIVER ACADEMY

I was equally pleased by the consistency of practice demonstrated by our teaching staff. The use of our shared "River language" was evident across the curriculum, helping to create a coherent and supportive learning experience for all students. This consistency is no accident. Since the start of term, many members of staff have been observed teaching between 10 and 15 times, receiving regular feedback from colleagues and leaders. Their commitment to continual improvement is one of the reasons our students continue to thrive.

Attendance

Attendance remains a source of enormous pride for River Academy. As I write this on Thursday evening, whole-school attendance stands at an impressive 96.7% for the year.

I have been particularly encouraged by the attendance of Year 9 over the past fortnight who have made a determined effort to improve their attendance and establish positive routines. Overall, our attendance is approximately 5% above the national secondary school average, with most year groups



performing at least 3% above national figures. This is testament to the partnership between home and school, and I am incredibly grateful for your support.

Quite simply, students who attend school regularly learn more, achieve more and benefit more from being part of our community.

Homework and Academic Success

Our strong attendance is complemented by encouraging Sparx homework completion rates. It has been noticeable in recent weeks how few Year 8 and Year 9 students are having to attend Friday catch-up sessions, with many attendees currently coming from Year 7. This is entirely understandable as our newest students continue to develop positive study habits and adapt to the expectations of secondary school. I would encourage all parents and carers of Year 7 students to support their children in spreading their weekly Sparx work across the week.

It has also been wonderful to see the enthusiasm surrounding our Axiom Maths programme. The engagement of students attending these additional sessions has been exceptional, and the impact on confidence and attainment is already becoming evident. I would like to extend my thanks to Miss MacDonald and Miss Gopalan for their commitment to delivering these opportunities and promoting mathematical excellence amongst our students. This week we had over 60 students participating in extra Maths sessions across the week.



Duke of Edinburgh Award launch

Year 9 parents, please be reminded that our Duke of Edinburgh award is being launched on Monday October 19th at 5pm in the Main Hall.

Working Together on Behaviour

I appreciate that detentions can take a little getting used to, particularly for Year 7 families who are new to the school.

May I respectfully ask that when your son or daughter receives a detention, your first reaction is not to immediately contact the school seeking an explanation. Detentions are only issued for clearly defined reasons, such as poor behaviour, missing equipment or incomplete homework. They are an important part of helping students develop organisation, responsibility and self-discipline.

As parents, one of the greatest gifts we can give children is the opportunity to learn from mistakes. Experiencing a consequence, reflecting on it and making a better choice next time is a valuable part of growing up.

When families joined River Academy, we were clear about our expectations and our behaviour systems. These expectations were discussed during open evenings, transition events and induction

activities and are linked to our published behaviour policy. The overwhelming majority of our students meet these expectations every day. Indeed, between 97% and 98% of students do not receive a detention on any given day.

Most of us can remember being 12 or 13 years old and the challenges that came with adolescence. Our role, both as parents and educators, is to guide young people towards making good choices, developing strong habits and understanding the value of hard work. In doing so, we help them secure greater opportunities and wider life chances in the future.



SLTea

Thank you to those parents who came to the SLTea event on Thursday after school. It was lovely to meet a number of parents and sit and discuss school and their children with us. This forum is something new we are trying to give parents the chance to build a rapport with the school and to discuss matters in person rather than via a keyboard. I hope you will be able to attend the next one on **Thursday 4th February**.



Looking Ahead

A final reminder that we break up for half term at the end of the school day on **Friday 23 October**. Students will return to school on **Tuesday 3 November at 9:05am**. Please do use half-term as a chance to buy any missing equipment, update uniform that is the wrong size or worn out and most importantly to get some rest!

Please do make a note of these dates. Every year there are a handful of students who arrive on INSET day, smartly dressed in full school uniform and carrying a packed bag, only to discover that the school site is completely empty! Whilst their commitment is admirable, I am sure they would much prefer an extra morning at home.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support. I hope that you and your families enjoy a restful and well-deserved weekend.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'A. Hartley'.

Andy Hartley
Headteacher
River Academy