



Date: October 2018

Dear Parent/Carer

We are coming towards the end of our first half-term of this academic year and I would just like to thank you once more for the continued support you have shown in our school. We have had, we believe, a very smooth start to the year and there has been a very positive atmosphere in school. The attitude to learning displayed by our students this term has been fantastic and they are very much living up to the high expectations we have of them. This covers all aspects of school life including their attitude, work ethic, attendance and behaviour as well as their uniform and appearance. We are also delighted to have welcomed 228 new students in Year 7 in September. They have settled in very well. We are pleased that so many parents are choosing our school and it shows a great deal of support from our local community. We had record numbers of prospective parents attending our Open Evening and Open Mornings this term.

GCSE Examination Results

We were delighted with our examination results this summer. English results were excellent again but importantly we saw an improvement in Maths, which will only improve further this coming year. Our Average Attainment 8 score was over 48 – an increase on last year and the third highest in the local authority. This means that the average grade at GCSE in the summer was just below a grade 5. In the new assessment and examination regime a grade 4 is a standard pass (equivalent to a Grade C) and a Grade 5 is now classed as a strong pass, equivalent to almost a Grade B. This is a fantastic achievement by our students and staff last year. When prior attainment is factored in, we are even more proud of these results. Our Progress 8 score this year is at present -0.06 though we know when the validated results come out in January this will improve further (we have had a large number of successful re-marks and the DFE also forgot to count the results of one our courses). This will therefore improve further and effectively means that students across the board are now making expected progress. Our Progress 8 score is particularly strong when you compare our school to others in North Tyneside. On this measure (as well as on the Attainment 8 measure) we were the third highest in North Tyneside. Please take the time to look at the DFE website at <https://www.gov.uk/school-performance-tables>. As you will see here we have had a significant increase in our Progress 8 score since last year. In fact, we are the most improved school in North Tyneside. We are also confident that there will be further improvements next year.

Attendance

The examination results in the summer also clearly showed us the importance of attendance. As we have been saying for a long time there is a direct correlation between attendance and achievement but it was particularly stark this summer. Our average GCSE grade was 4.8. For students with attendance over 98% it was actually 5.4 and for students with attendance between 95% and 98% it was 5.1. However, students who attended for less than 95% of the year only achieved an average GCSE grade of 4.4 and for students below 92% it was 3.8. When each students' progress is calculated it is even clearer. Students whose attendance was above 95% made much better than expected progress, whereas students below that level underachieved. **There cannot be a stronger message I can give you around the importance of attendance.**

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Parent Evening feedback

Attendance at Parent Evenings was over 80% again in 2017/18 – thank you for supporting your children and our school in this way. Nearly 600 parents filled in the survey we administer on these evenings and the results were very positive indeed. 96% of you feel your child is happy here and taught well, 98% feel they are safe, well looked after and make good progress, 99% feel the school is welcoming and friendly towards parents and over 95% of you would recommend our school to another parent. In our first survey of this year at the first Year 7 Parent Evening we had 120 responses to our questionnaire. Over 98% thought that their child was well prepared for the move from Primary school to High School and 97% felt that they had all the information they needed relating to the move.

Further developments since our last Ofsted inspection

We have a full and comprehensive Action Plan and we have made some significant changes since the Ofsted inspection in November 2017. We have now had a full Pupil Premium review and are acting on its recommendations and we are currently undertaking a review of Governance. Both of these reviews have been undertaken by people external to the school. The management of the Maths department has changed and we now have a new curriculum leader, Amanda Tunmore who joined us before the Summer. Amanda brings with her a wealth of experience from working in other schools and has a strong record of building success in Maths departments. We have a detailed action plan in place for Maths and since the Ofsted inspection we have implemented a lot of change in the department. We are constantly in the process of reviewing teaching and learning to scrutinise standards and ensure that students are pushed and supported at the right level at every stage of their school life. The curriculum in Maths, like all subjects, is regularly reviewed and carefully mapped. We have a clear focus on progress with dedicated time given by teachers to review what students can and can't do, adapting their teaching to help students address any gaps in their knowledge. Regular tests help with the retention of knowledge and show if students have filled these gaps or need any extra support. Students sit one of two papers in Maths in Year 11 and in order to ensure they receive targeted support and intervention we have setting in Years 7 and 8. Sets in Maths are further refined in Years 9 to 11 and Home Learning is designed to both support and challenge at each stage. We also employ an additional one to one tutor providing specific support for students, and exam preparation where needed and we also run small group Maths enrichment sessions at Key Stage 4. We were pleased to see the positive impacts of this curriculum mapping work in the summer where students overall progress in Maths (how well a student achieves compared to how they were expected to achieve based on their grades when they started at George Stephenson) increased by a third of a grade on average from the previous year which is an excellent improvement and one the team are determined to build on.

Our staff are also working, as recommended by Ofsted, to introduce even more challenge into lessons and we are continuing to ensure that we all have the highest expectations for our young people. The vast majority of our young people do achieve well here but we believe that this increase in challenge in lessons will help them even more. Our departments are continuously reviewing the challenge in their curriculum through a curriculum mapping exercise to ensure that any necessary changes are swift in light of changes to examinations in Key Stage 4 and the increased demand at a primary school level. We have changed our Home Learning policy and returned to more regular home learning for all year groups. Recent staff training sessions have focussed on questioning skills, differentiation and literacy and numeracy. We have also increased the rigour of our own monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. This has involved support from the Local Authority and other schools and has involved us reviewing and adapting our approach to lesson observations, work scrutiny, student voice and departmental self-evaluation and curriculum area reviews. We are completely focused on meeting the higher expectations of the new Ofsted framework, but, more importantly, on ensuring that all of our students achieve the very best possible results in all their subjects. The Ofsted report has only served to strengthen our resolve in tackling the issues and improving consistency across the school.

Our results this summer have shown that we have made good progress as a school and we are confident we will continue to improve in the coming years.

Yours sincerely



IAN D WILKINSON
Headteacher