



4 September 2015

Dear Parents and Carers

As the start of the new term I am pleased to write to you with news of our encouraging examination performance this summer at The Folkestone Academy. I should also like to take the opportunity to explain in more detail the new approach to homework, first outlined in my letter dated 29th July.

Sixth Form. Our A Level and BTEC performance was very strong and has led to fifty-six students being offered places at university, a record for the Academy. This was the first group to have completed their Sixth Form experience at the Glassworks and I am sure that their outstanding learning environment, coupled with some superb teaching and pastoral care, played a part in these results. However, the key to success was the individual effort and commitment of the students and I am sure that the whole school community will wish to congratulate all the leavers as they set out on the next stage of their development.

GCSEs. Our GCSE performance was also strong and a significant improvement on last year. In government league tables the headline measure for the last decade or so has been the percentage of pupils achieving five GCSEs at grade C or above. In a selective system, this measure inevitably places grammar schools at an advantage, and 2015 is the last year where it will be used. From 2016, the new headline measure is Progress 8, which calculates the progress each pupil makes across eight subjects, and not simply their final grade. We are very confident that this change is a positive one for the Academy. I will seek opportunities during the year ahead to explain these changes in more detail to you.

Curriculum. Another significant change for this year is the introduction of more rigorous structure and content in many subjects, including English and Mathematics. The breadth of content is significantly greater than in the courses they replace; put simply, pupils need to know more, and must be able to do more in order to pass these qualifications in the future. This change was instigated by the Department for Education and all examination boards have responded by introducing these more challenging qualifications from September 2015.

Homework. To help students prepare for the new exams we have adapted our timetable, removing two of the four extension activities so as to provide an additional three hours a week of conventional teaching time. However, my professional judgement and that of my teaching colleagues is that this will not be enough to keep pace with the increased content. Therefore we have decided to introduce formalised arrangements for homework for all year groups. I am sorry if news of this in my letter to parents at the end of last term came as a surprise, and I appreciate that it did deserve more explanation. To this end, we will convene an early meeting of the Parents Forum to explain and discuss the new policy and address questions and feedback from you. I shall also seek other opportunities to explain how we are addressing these challenges.

The primary objective of the homework is to help pupils reinforce what they learn in their lessons in school. The arrangements are as follows:

- Each pupil will be set approximately five hours of homework a week, which is an increase compared with the previous arrangements.
- Homework will be set by subject according to a rota, and will be planned up to a week ahead so that pupils will be able to manage their time effectively.
- Homework tasks will be available on the Academy website, together with information and materials that help in completing it. Pupils without access to the internet can have the tasks printed, and we will offer assistance during extension time to pupils who have difficulties in completing homework outside the Academy.

Pupils will deserve and need our encouragement in completing their homework if they are to achieve their full potential. At the Academy, we will award additional credits where work is completed satisfactorily and on time, and effort scores will be adjusted downwards where it is not. We hope that you will also offer every possible encouragement. You may recall from your own time at school that reading texts is often best done in private, and learning things like spelling and French vocabulary can often best be done alone and undisturbed.

The Academy staff, Trustees and I are determined to give your child every possible opportunity to do well academically and to prepare them effectively for life and work ahead of them. We would value your support in this and hope we can work together to ensure your child's success. In introducing these measures we are adapting to the changes imposed by the new curriculum and I hope that my description of the new measures will help to better explain this development in our policy.

If you would like to discuss further any aspect of these changes please do get in touch with your child's house tutor in the first instance. You are also very welcome to attend the Parents Forum, details of which will be announced in the next few days, and I hope to see many of you there.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Warren Smith', with a stylized, cursive script.

Warren Smith
Headteacher