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Dear Parents, Carers and Families,

When I started in post here at the school in September, I told staff that I would be making it a priority to see all teachers teach and then meet with them afterwards to talk about both the lesson and their approach to teaching in general. We employ 82 teachers here, including myself, so this represents a significant investment of time but teaching and learning is the single most important thing we do here, so it is right that looking at this, being committed to ensuring we develop the teaching in the school to the highest possible standard so that all our students achieve the excellence they deserve, should be my main focus as headteacher. All successful organisations show fidelity to their main purpose, and this is a school, so our primary focus must be on the teaching and learning that happens here.

However, this is something that's simple to say but, in reality, life is more complicated. The report this week from the Social Metrics Commission shows that 1 in 3 children in this country now live in poverty, or in real terms 5.2 million young people. Such a high figure has the potential to be just seen as a statistic, but we see here in school the fact that some of our students arrive cold, hungry and without access to clean clothing or a comfortable place to sleep. If this is your lived life, then being asked to focus on learning can seem like the wood is being missed for the trees. We also know that growing up in such conditions puts you at risk for succumbing to mental health challenges (although this can also be true for young people in better resourced households) yet the support for these children who are struggling in this way, while there, is so stretched that those who need help now can find themselves waiting literally years for an initial assessment before anyone begins to offer them the help they need. In addition, the government has promised additional funding to support SEND students, but this will only plug gaps to stop the whole system from collapsing rather than offer the sustained improvement I would argue it needs. In the face of all this it is easy to feel despondent and, if these challenges, plus others, are true for you and your family, it can be hard in the moment to see how maths, English, science and all the other subjects we offer here can be of immediate help.

However, the role of the school is to be a beacon of optimism in the face of these challenges. Since coming into post in September this is my tenth Headteacher's Update. In my first I said the aim of the updates would be "to provide a sense of our values, beliefs and main aims as a school." The values of the school remain unchanged in that we do believe we should be compassionate in how we treat and respond to every student, regardless of their circumstances but we also believe that the single main aim of the school should be to provide as excellent an education as possible for all, not because we feel a certain level of education is what makes you a success as a person but because every child in our care should have as many choices open to them as possible at the end of their time here to pursue the future they want and the future they deserve. A school should be a place where we see the challenges that all face but offer hope, make

every child know that “Hope is the thing with feathers”, that we can help them take flight towards success and, if they work with us, they’ll be able to take that flight in whichever direction they wish. Education has the power to provide us all with hope that we can change the world and don’t have to accept the status quo and, ten Headteacher updates in, I’d like to thank every one of you who responded positively to the fact that this is what we’re trying to offer every student here and that I’ve been trying to convey since September.

Please note that there will be no Headteacher Update next week as **the school is closed to students on Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> and Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November.**

Many thanks for your continued support of the school; I hope you all have a good weekend.



Michael Wright

Please find this week's key messages below.

### **Closure of access to the school site from the pedestrian gate on Old Pit Lane**

Many thanks for your support with this change to the school. In response to feedback, we’ve asked that some of the road markings within the school site be repainted to highlight where students are crossing when they arrive in school via Newton Drive. I did say we’d review this by 2<sup>nd</sup> December. At the moment the intention would be to keep the change. While it’s unclear precisely when building work might begin it looks increasingly likely that not only will it start soon within the calendar year of 2025 but regardless of start date, construction traffic will force the closure of that gate and therefore managing the change now seems the most appropriate course of action.

### **Art Department Instagram**

We’re excited to share that our Art Department has active Instagram accounts showcasing our students' amazing creativity, as well as other highlights, and updates on events and exhibitions. Following us is a great way to stay connected and celebrate the artistic talents of our young artists and photographers. Please take a moment to follow us and support our vibrant art community. The accounts can be found by searching for @thisisfsdartanddesign and @thisisfsdphotography.

Mr Carney, Teacher of Art

## **Un club de lecture!**

This year is the launch of the French Department's first French book club for Year 7. Every Friday lunchtime, Year 7 students are going to be exploring French stories together. Students will be using their growing knowledge of the French language, and their reading strategies from their classes, to infer the meaning of different French tales. Beginning with the adventure of *Jacques et le Haricot Magique* by Robert Giraud, the Year 7 book club 'lecteurs' will then have access to other books such as the Mr Men and Little Miss series in French, *Les Monsieur Madame*, as well as the well-known French series "Max et Lili". The book club not only provides students with access to French culture outside of the classroom, but also a dedicated time to reading and developing their literacy skills – of course, all in a new language! With activities based on the pages they read, this club aims to broaden their knowledge of the French language, whilst also promoting the joy of reading. We can't wait to get started this week! Bonne lecture!

Dr Rushton, Teacher of MFL

## **Sixth Form Update**

Our sixth formers have started their review meetings with their subject teachers this week, where they have the opportunity to reflect on their progress and to plan their next steps.

It has been wonderful to see more of our Year 13 students submitting their university applications and receiving offers of places this week; it is always exciting for them -and us- when the offers start coming through!

Dr Smith kindly launched our Broadening Horizons Award with Year 12 students on Wednesday. This is an opportunity for them to engage in super-curricular activities, developing their academic knowledge and skills before planning and delivering a presentation on how they have 'broadened their horizons'.

A reminder that our Sixth Form Progress Evening takes place on **Thursday 5th December**; parents and carers have been sent the link to make appointments.

Mrs King, Head of 6<sup>th</sup> Form

## **Updating Key Records about your child**

It is important to us that we keep our records up to date concerning your child. We will be using a portal called SIMs Parent App Lite. You will be able to amend your contact details as well as medical information and other details that we currently hold for all your children.

It is essential that you check this information for the safeguarding of your child.

You will need to check and or amend the details online. We can then verify these changes before committing them to our central school system.

We will be sending out an email invitation to register for the parent app lite and have also included instructions about how to register for it with this email. Please look out for an email from [noreply@sims.co.uk](mailto:noreply@sims.co.uk) (check your spam folder for it too).

Once registered it is very easy to navigate and amend your child or children's details. You can also log in and just confirm they are correct.

We aim to do this once a year, but you can amend information at any time if you need to do. We are notified of any requests to change details throughout the year.

### ***Getting started with the SIMS Parent app***

1. We will send you an activation email, simply click on the link from your tablet, PC or smartphone to activate your account.
2. Please make sure that you click "Register with an external account"  
You can then login using your normal Facebook, Twitter, Google or Microsoft username and password.
4. From your smartphone or tablet, download the app from the Google Play or Apple App store - search for SIMS Parent.
5. From a PC or Windows phone, login online at [www.sims-parent.co.uk](http://www.sims-parent.co.uk)

We have also attached some more detailed instructions as a pdf to this email.

If this process is something you find difficult then please contact us and we will try to talk you through it; or if you need to change any contact details then please contact student reception who will make the changes for you.

Mrs Merch-Roberts, Deputy Headteacher