

May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

In March this year, I interviewed for the post of Head of School at John O'Gaunt and it is a privilege to have been appointed by the school Governors and Excalibur Trust to lead such a fantastic school. I will formally start at John O'Gaunt by the end of June and earlier in the month if circumstances allow. Although the current situation means we can't yet meet face to face as I had hoped, I thought that it would be good to send you a few words by way of introduction for now.

I have to say that when I saw the post advertised I genuinely turned to my wife and told her that my dream Headship had come up. Having lived in West Berkshire for nearly 20 years, I know the area and was aware of the school by reputation. I also knew some parents of students who attended, although it was some years ago now. One of these once told me that when I was ready to be a Head that I should apply to John O'Gaunt!

It will come as little surprise to you then that I'm really excited to be joining the school. When I met staff and students during my visit prior to the interview and during interview day itself, the sense of community was palpable. It is clear that staff and students are rightly proud of the school and that both academic success and personal development are equally important. This aligns with my own values. I believe that schools should be a place where we demand the highest quality in all we do and where everyone is challenged and supported to be the best version of themselves. I also think that schools should be a place where young people are nurtured and cared for, are able to enjoy what they do and taught the wider skills to enable them to be resilient, dynamic and successful people.

I currently work as a Deputy Headteacher at a small semi-rural community school in Sonning, Berkshire, with oversight of teaching and learning, curriculum, assessment and staff performance. The school actually has lots in common with John O'Gaunt, especially the community feel and particular challenges of running smaller academies. I was moved from my role as Deputy at the lead Trust school about 18 months ago to bolster the senior leadership team. My time in this Trust has included serving a term as Acting Head of School, Director of a Teaching School and Trust Lead for professional development and staff performance. Previous roles in my last 20 years in teaching have all been around comprehensive settings and have included Assistant Headteacher, Local Authority Consultant, PGCE Examiner, Lead Professional and teaching and learning lead. At heart though, I'm a teacher and I always value my time in the classroom working closely with young people; this is something I will continue to do at John O'Gaunt.

I see myself as a real family man outside of work and have two young sons who provide all the joys and frustrations you will no doubt empathize with! My eldest will be transferring to his secondary school (hopefully!) this September and it's given myself and my wife, who is also a teacher, a renewed sense of understanding about the importance of providing the very best



secondary education. In between family and work duties I love to cycle and play golf as well as watching any sport that might happen to come on the TV. I'm usually very sociable, but when I need some time away you might occasionally find me beside a lake or river doing a spot of fishing.

My vision for John O'Gaunt is clear; I am determined to continue building on the many strengths that it already has and ensure that we deliver excellence in every aspect of school life, in a way that lives and breathes the values I have spoken of above. To do this, we'll need the continued engagement, feedback, patience and support of all our stakeholders which of course includes yourselves. I am sure that if we work together, keep open lines of communication and open minds, we'll achieve the excellence that we're all striving to obtain for all our young people. Rest assured, that I am determined that the school builds on its legacy and continues to flourish and maintain its position at the heart of our community.

Of course, my immediate priorities upon starting will be a little more simplistic. Whilst I have several ideas for how we can ensure our school further improves, there's an awful lot I need to learn and take on board and I've started fact-finding already through remote meetings with Trust and school colleagues, with more planned in the weeks ahead. Clearly, one of my first priorities is to get to know staff, students and yourselves. With this in mind, I will write to you as soon as I can with further details about how we can provide opportunities to meet face-to-face, but given the uncertainty of our current circumstances, I hope you'll understand why I can't be more definitive right now.

I think that it is only right that I end by paying heartfelt tribute and gratitude to Mrs Walker and her team, who it is evident have done a great job at the school this past year as I'm sure you'll agree. I'm looking forward to working with her and the whole staff body, yourselves, the Governors, the Trust and of course the students to carry on our journey to excellence.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Richard Hawthorne". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "R" and "H".

**Richard Hawthorne**  
**Head of School Designate**