

October 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

Re: A few updates

It seems hard to believe that we're in the fifth week of the academic year already. Therefore, I thought it would be a good time to write to you with a few updates.

Firstly, thank you for your support in getting your children to us looking smart, equipped and ready to learn. Whether they were joining us in Year 7 or returning to us in older year groups, having sent my own two children back to school at the start of September, I am well aware of the pleasure and pain this can lead to at home!

By now, every child should be in full and correct uniform in line with our 'Uniform and Dress Code Policy', which can be found on our website here: <https://www.johnogauntschool.co.uk/about-jog/policies/>. However, if you have an issue that you think the school should know about, please contact your child's tutor in the first instance. Of course, the yellow and red uniform slips that I outlined in the key information at the start of the year are there for unforeseen issues that sometimes occur.

Around the school, it has been a very positive start to the new term. Walking around as I do on a regular basis, the sense of a calm, purposeful and learning-focussed atmosphere is palpable. It's also a little busier in school as we now have over 460 students on roll with us. Our new Year 7 students are settling in well and beginning to find their way around the school. They are now our largest year group, so whilst they are in the company of older students, they're certainly not outnumbered!

We have had one or two issues with unwanted or over-zealous contact between some students, in the form of playfighting or something similar, particularly in Years 7. Heads of House held an assembly to remind them of our 'no-contact school' approach and our expectations of playing nicely together. Students in other year groups will be reminded through tutors this week too. It hasn't escalated beyond a few minor incidences at this stage, but we do want to nip it in the bud now. As ever, parental support is a vital part of reinforcing our messages, so we would really appreciate you doing so once again about this issue and have a conversation at home. Thank you.

Before students joined us at the start of the September, staff spent two days in school undertaking important training and meetings, in preparation for the year ahead. Whilst that all feels ages ago already, I have to say that I haven't lost the sense of pride that I work alongside such caring, dedicated and professional colleagues. On learning walks we're seeing highly effective teaching and learning and excellent academic and pastoral support too. Our students have come back in what seems to be a genuinely positive state-of-mind and the vast majority are rising to the challenges we're setting them very strongly.

Of course, we constantly seek to learn and develop, so alongside our weekly training meetings, we have a number of additional professional development activities planned in the coming weeks and months, focussed on a range of topics to ensure we offer the best possible provision to every child at JOG. Not least on my own agenda is ensuring that we're supporting GCSE students prepare for their exams and, for Year 11s the forthcoming November mock exams.

I'm also focussed on securing candidates for teaching and support posts that we haven't yet been able to fill. We're working hard with our Trust on this and have robust plans in place where there are vacancies. This has included calling in well-known staff to provide cover and support; one staff member has even come back

from retirement to teach with us in Computing for the short-term! We know that it's not ideal to have cover staff, but please be assured that we're doing all that we can.

The term has been busy for other reasons too and there have already been a number of important things going on in school. Year 7 students have completed their Cognitive Ability Tests (CATS), which combined with their SATS data from Primary School, help us build a clear picture of their areas of strength and need, as well as help to predict their potential 'flight path' to GCSEs. The latter is something we'll be covering more about in our forthcoming Parents' Forum, which I'll be writing to you about in the near future.

We're also in the midst of recruiting for our 2023/24 Student Leadership Group (SLG). Similar to a traditional student council, this group of students represent the student body on important school and student matters, as well as leading on projects too. Please do encourage your child to get involved, they'll be making a real difference to the school and developing life and leadership skills along the way too. Mrs Morgan runs SLG so please do get in touch with her if you'd like to know more or have any queries.

We recently held our 'Welcome to GCSE' information evening. This important event provided some key information for Year 10 students and their parents/carers about what to expect from the next two years and how best to approach supporting your child. In a change from our usual format, we provided time for parents to talk to subject staff, rather than simply listening to lots of presentations. A number of the parents who attended certainly gave positive feedback about this approach to me! There was a lot of important information on the night, so if you missed it please do head to our website to catch up here: <https://www.johnogauntschool.co.uk/curriculum/curriculum-subjects/>

Last week we also held our 'Meet the tutor' evening for parents/carers of Year 7 students. Again, for us there was a change of format for this evening, part of which saw us asking parents to send their queries into school in advance as well as providing two time slots to choose from. The evening was well attended, and the feedback was again positive. As you can tell, we're working hard to provide the best possible experience for parents at these events, so if you have any suggestions then please do contact the school or, better still, attend the upcoming Parents' Forum.

There have of course been many other things happening in school, ranging from important assemblies to launch and then embed our new school values of 'Ambition, Care, Courage', as well as school photos and careers interviews to name just a few. In the coming weeks, there are also a number of important upcoming events, which I thought it would be worth drawing your attention to here:

- Year 11 Parents' Consultation Evening – Thursday 5th October
- Open Evening – Thursday 12th October please note **early closure: 1.30pm**
- Open Mornings – Friday 13th October (**late start of 9.45am for students**) and Monday 16th October (**school open at the usual time of 8.45am**)
- House matches – week commencing 16th October
- End of Term 1 – Friday 20th October
- Start of Term 2 – Monday 30th October
- Parents' Forum – Tuesday 7th November
- Year 11 Mock Exams – commence Monday 13th November
- Year 8 Parents' Consultation Evening – Thursday 16th November

You'll notice from this list that we have our Open Evening and first Open Morning next week. As a result, you'll notice that we're closing school for students at 1.30pm on Thursday 12th October. On Friday 13th October, students will start the day slightly later at 9.45am. On Monday 16th October we start at the usual time of 8.45am. Transport will run as usual on these days, taking account of any revised times of the day. Please do keep an eye out for separate communications for the other events, nearer the time.

If you have any queries about these events, or anything else then please do not hesitate to contact the school. In the meantime, thank you for your ongoing support for JOG.

Yours sincerely,



Mr R Hawthorne
Principal