



VERULAM
SCHOOL

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Dear Parent/Carer,

One of my early commitments in my first term as Headteacher at Verulam was to listen to people that have a stake in our school: students, staff, parents, governors and the wider community.

Clearly, our Ofsted inspection this week has added a further dimension to this. Thanks to the over 200 parents who completed the Parent View survey. The results of the survey are public and can be found [here](#). We were very pleased that 96% of you said that your child was safe at school and 9 in 10 of you would recommend the school to someone else. Until the Ofsted report is finalised and published, I can't comment further upon the outcome, but the process was robust and fair and in line with our own self-evaluation of the strengths of the school and where we need to develop further.

I'd like to thank parents who have come in to see me during the Headteacher surgeries, emailed me or completed a survey. We absolutely share the same goal about wanting the best for your children. I've tried to summarise below the common themes from your feedback along with a comment on what we propose to do in response.

- Communication: We will move to a more frequent online newsletter from September. We are looking to reduce the number of systems and apps that the school uses to communicate with you. We will endeavour to be more accessible (a further round of HT surgeries are planned for after half term.)
- Raising concerns: Please raise concerns with your child's form tutor or class teacher for a specific subject in the first instance. Then escalation can be made to the Head of Year/Faculty, Deputy Head and then Headteacher. Please try to use informal mechanisms and the escalation pathway before raising a formal complaint and give us a reasonable amount of time to respond since teachers can't usually access email during the school day
- Academic progress: We are reviewing how we report on your child's progress to make sure it is easy to understand and helps you to know where your child is and how you can support them
- More PE/Sports clubs and fixtures: I am keen that Verulam returns to our traditional position of being a sporting powerhouse locally, including in my personal passions of rugby and football. We have added more provision for racquet sports in recent years

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but we are limited in that we have only 4 full-time PE teachers to cover all sports and year groups. Please see below if you can help by volunteering.

- More extra-curricular provision in creative arts: We are certainly aiming to do this but again are limited by staff resources. We are looking at working across the Trust to enhance this offer (e.g. joint drama production with STAGS) but any volunteers would also help to broaden what we can offer.
- Trips: We will publish a trips calendar with indicative costs every September so that you can plan ahead. We are planning a trip open to the current year 9 in the autumn term as we appreciate that they have missed out due to Covid and other circumstances.
- Staffing and supply teaching: There is a national issue with recruitment into teaching profession for a number of years now, which also impacts who we can access for supply cover when teachers are ill or absent. We always try to find the best, but are limited by what is available. We will work closely with the expanding Trust to help and we await the plans of the new government in July to help to solve the national issue!
- Support for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities: Again, there is a national issue with SEND funding and the support that we are able to access from the local authority. This has been highlighted in the [recent report into provision in Hertfordshire](#). In school, we will do our best with the resources available and we will have a whole school focus on adaptive teaching in the classroom throughout next year to ensure that all students have fair access to the curriculum.
- Stretch and challenge for able students: We will have a member of the Senior Leadership Team with a focus on raising aspirations. We have plans for an exciting super-curriculum and scholars programme that supports students to deepen their knowledge and passion in subjects, and further develop the Oxbridge programme, debating, careers advice and work experience in the sixth form.
- Food: Rapidly rising inflation makes delivering nutritionally balanced meals for the free school meal cost of £2.75 a significant challenge. We are in the process of appointing a new catering contractor and we will meet with them to improve choice and healthier options.

The observations and requests above tend to break down into two strands: those that are clearly areas within the scope of Verulam to improve, and those that are constraints imposed by lack of funding or issues at a national level. Expectations of what are possible need to be moderated by what we can afford in a very tight budgetary situation. Although the government maintains that [overall school funding is at record levels](#), the experience on the ground at Verulam is that costs have risen quickly and [our income has not](#). Whichever government is formed in July will need to address the national school funding issues as a matter of urgency. I raised this with our current MP, Daisy Cooper, this week and perhaps you can also raise it with the candidates as they campaign in the coming weeks.

One solution is to simply attract more students to Verulam. Each student is granted around £5k on average of annual funding from the central government to cover every aspect of school provision, so growing the school will lead to more income. Hopefully a combination of great outcomes in future and shaping excellent young people will make community perceptions increasingly positive and parents/students of the future will opt to select Verulam in year 7 and 12. Although we strive to have the best possible provision, I would ask you to calibrate your expectations, particularly in comparison with independent schools that charge around £25k fees per annum and therefore have five times the resources available per child.

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You can play your part in helping to support the school, if you can afford to. Of course, there is no pressure or expectation of doing so. While core education will always be free in a state school, your support in terms of time and financial resources can develop the additional facilities and extra-curricular activities many of you have told me that you want. There are four ways that you can help:

- Volunteer your time, particularly if you can help with running a regular sports or extracurricular club at lunchtime or after school and are prepared to undertake the necessary safeguarding checks. Please fill in the form [here](#) to let us know what you could offer and what experience you have.
- Support the Verulam Parent Teacher Association. Please contact the chair Jane Gomez to join the association and support their work in funding additional classroom equipment, educational resources or bigger purchases such as the electric minibus that we hope to acquire to replace one that has reached end of life. Even if you can't commit time, please follow the PTA on social media and come to the fundraising events (for example, the PTA quiz on 14th June), join the regular lottery or use the easy fundraising link that provides some income to the school from your everyday online purchases. Full information here: <https://verulamschool.co.uk/get-involved/>
- Make a one-off donation via ParentPay. There is a standing item on your account to facilitate this.
- Make a regular donation to the Verulam Charitable Trust using Gift Aid. At the moment, only 2% of parents make a regular donation of £10 per month on average. Of course there is a cost of living crisis and not everyone can afford to do this, but even if we could lift regular donations to £5 per week and have 25% of parents contribute, this would generate £85k per year after gift aid and make a massive difference to what could be provided, and to provide 'match-funding' when we approach grant awarding organisations. An example of this is our plan to work with St Albans City FC to approach the Football Foundation to provide funding to develop a 3G astroturf pitch at Sandpit Lane that will transform provision for the school and wider community. More information on how you can make a regular donation to the charitable trust is here: <https://verulamschool.co.uk/verulam-charitable-trust/>

I apologise for the length of this letter, but I wanted to have a very open and honest communication with you, and that will be my approach going forward.

As a school, we can and will do better, but in the words of the old proverb, "it takes a village to raise a child". We will strive to improve as a school, but we can only achieve this with your support and understanding, and thank you for this in advance.

Further Headteacher surgery appointments will be offered after the May half term and can be booked using the school cloud platform. I will write to you again with a summary of our 2024-2025 School Improvement Plan in early September.

Yours faithfully



Fergal Moane
Headteacher