



VERULAM
SCHOOL

Headteacher: Fergal Moane

Brampton Road
St Albans
Hertfordshire
AL1 4PR
Tel: 01727 766100

www.verulamschool.co.uk
Email: head@verulam.aat.school

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Dear Parents/Carers

As we come towards the end of the summer term, I am writing to you with an update on the arrangements for the end of this term, summer exam results and the start of the new academic year.

This has been a busy and successful first term for me as headteacher, and I am grateful for your feedback and support. I was delighted that Ofsted visited this term and validated the good work that has been undertaken at Verulam in the past few years on the curriculum, safeguarding, behaviour and inclusion. We have been given a few things to work on, and the staff are motivated to continue the journey from 'Good' to 'Outstanding' (if this still exists under the new government!)

School calendar dates

Friday 19th July. End of summer term, early close for all students at 12:20pm. This is a non-uniform day, please donate at least £1 in aid of the Oli Mills Foundation [here](#) or bring cash and hand to form tutors.

Thursday 15th August: A-level results collection from 9am in the Main Hall.

Thursday 22nd August: GCSE results collection and sixth form admission queries from 9am in the Main Hall.

Monday 2nd September: All staff day. No students on site.

Tuesday 3rd September: Return of year 7 and 12 only. Year 7 report to Bradshaw building and year 12 to the sixth form centre by 8:35am. Students will have their school photos taken and we will collect biometric data on this day.

Wednesday 4th September: All students in school from 8:35am.

Note that during the summer break, Hertfordshire County Council are providing financial assistance for those eligible for benefits-related free school meals and you can book onto free summer camps as part of the HAPpy programme. Please look out for a letter from the school with details of the voucher scheme and how to book the summer camps for those who are eligible.

Trust merger

By the time we return in September, Verulam will be part of a new Trust, the Ambition Education Trust. This will consist of ten schools, five secondary and five primary, formed from the merger of the Alban Academies Trust and ATLAS. With the merger, St Albans Girls' School, Adeyfield and Beech Hyde school will join our existing Trust

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family. I am particularly excited about the prospect of working with STAGS, given the history of the two schools as the former boys and girls' grammar schools in St Albans and a history of collaboration that will now further deepen. There should be no significant changes for our students or staff, other than the benefits of working within a larger group of like-minded local schools. Our school email addresses will change in September to reflect the merger, for example, the admin address will be admin@verulam.aetrust.uk Speaking of admin, please let us know via this address if there are contact details (email, phone numbers etc.) that need updating.

Site developments

Since we are part of an Academy Trust over a certain size, the Department for Education automatically allocates a certain amount of capital funding to be spent on improving the condition of school buildings. I am delighted to say that over £180k has been allocated to Verulam, and the refurbishment work will continue this summer. The sports hall changing rooms will be refurbished and improvements in classroom flooring and fixtures in Art and Science will be undertaken. There are also less visible but essential upgrades in roofing and fencing. I would ask for your support in speaking to your child about respect for school facilities. Toilet facilities were refurbished only recently and are sadly often vandalised and graffiti daubed within the cubicles where CCTV can't be used. Repairs and cleaning all cost money that could otherwise be spent on education, and I will be speaking to all students on the last day about our core value of Respect also applying to our school facilities, environment and when out in the community wearing the Verulam uniform.

Probably the most visible and exciting change is the appointment of a new catering company across the trust, [Culinera](#). They are an education focussed caterer that prioritise creating the best dishes from local British ingredients and have plans to upgrade the catering facilities in both the main canteen and sixth form centre. Representatives from our student council were at the tasting event before their appointment and I am pleased that our excellent current catering staff will be taken on by the new company. Just to temper expectations, they have not found a miracle way to avoid food-price inflation, but I am hoping that students will see a positive change in the choice of food on offer. Our move to using biometrics to access the canteen will also help to improve the lunch and break experience.

Another exciting site development is the acquisition of Electric Minibuses across the BeauSandVer consortium. We have the new bus on a lease and I have asked the PTA to direct some of their fundraising activities to help us to support this important step to make our school more sustainable. Our solar panels are already providing 60-75% of our electricity usage in the summer months and we will also be installing EV charging points to supply the buses and our staff and visitors.

Linked to the environment, I am delighted to see that former Verulam student Steve Reed OBE has been appointed as Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. This is a testament to what can be achieved by a high-quality state school education and we have invited Mr Reed to speak as part of our 'Engaging Minds' lecture series.

We currently provide school lockers but now plan to move to the market leading company, [Independent Locker Solutions](#). They will upgrade and maintain lockers on our site and deal with parents directly. Further information on rentals will be provided in a separate letter. Please can you remind your child that they should clear out lockers and remove locks before the end of term, as we will be removing the existing lockers over the summer break.

We have had complaints from local residents about parents parking inconsiderately or illegally parking on the zig zag lines outside the school to drop off or collect students. Please don't do this, students are well able to walk to be collected a little further away from the congested school gate.

Educational developments

The new government has been making positive noises about some of the themes that are challenging for young people and schools at the moment, including mental health, teacher recruitment, provision for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and school budgets. We await further details on how policies will develop in the months ahead.

Taking on board your feedback and that from staff and our Ofsted inspection, we have developed our School Improvement Plan for the next academic year. It can be found [here](#).

Many priorities remain the same as before, but a significant change is a decision to move away from the DPR assessment system that didn't provide the developmental feedback in a way that parents and students found easy to use and understand. Ofsted also offered a view on how we should make adjustments to our assessment approach in their inspection report. We will be delivering report and assessment data via Bromcom's 'My Child At School' app/portal, and will also move payments and messaging over to this platform in future, reducing the number of different logins needed. The reporting model will be based upon work we have done with Sandringham and STAGS to combine the best of their approaches. Sixth form reporting will be unchanged as this is agreed across the BSV consortium. Students are also enthusiastic in returning to the wider use of Google Classroom. More information will be provided in the parent information evening scheduled for each year group in the Autumn term.

Our focus in terms of teaching next year is upon 'adaptive teaching', ensuring that all students can access the curriculum and also that our highest attainers have opportunities to stretch themselves via the 'Super Curriculum' and receive recognition for developing their passion for learning. More information will follow in the new academic year. There are also some small adjustments to the school behaviour policy that we will communicate to you and publish on the school website in September.

In the autumn term, we will write with details of a multi-year trips calendar with estimated costs, to allow you to plan more effectively, as I recognise that costs for travel are rising and families need to be selective on which trips are affordable. We are also looking to boost UK day trips and our extra curricular clubs offer. Again, more details will be circulated in the new term when we have worked up a programme after our new staff have joined us.

Attendance

The evidence of a link between attendance and examination outcomes is clear. Even 90% attendance means missing a month of school each year, and these gaps are difficult to close.

A new set of duties upon schools relating to raising attendance comes into force from August 2024. This includes a duty to report daily attendance data to the Department of Education and to the Local Authority for students who are missing due to illness. Note that the government has established a national threshold of fines that may be issued after 10 sessions (i.e. 5 school days of morning and afternoon sessions) of unauthorised absence in a rolling period of 10 school weeks. Fines are rising and are per parent, per child. Please see the separate letter that we have sent from Hertfordshire County Council with more details.

We hope to work positively with families to ensure that children on our roll attend regularly and provide support to help them to do so, but please note that holidays taken during term time will now likely trigger a fine and the circumstances in which I can authorise absence are very narrow.

Departing staff and new joiners

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We say goodbye and thank you to a number of staff who are leaving Verulam at the end of term. First and foremost are those taking retirement who have served Verulam with distinction for many years. Our librarian Mr Smyth has retired after over 20 years of service and putting reading at the heart of the school. Mr Skipper has been an inspirational teacher of English and led the Sixth Form for many years with great skill and care. Deputy Headteacher Mr Freakley has likewise served the school for over 16 years and so many students have benefitted from his vision, optimism and nurture. They have been great servants to the school, custodians of our culture, and we will miss them.

Other leavers include Director of Science Mr Jamali who is relocating to Hong Kong, and Mr Greaves, Mr Hagos and Mrs Crichton from science are also moving on. Director of English Mrs Mitchell and English teachers Miss Davey and Miss Wilson have secured appointments at other schools. Head of Social Sciences Ms Nicholls and Head of Drama Mr MacKenzie have likewise secured other posts and we thank them for the expert and inspirational leadership in their subjects. Mr Austen is leaving our Business teaching team and Ms Vasa, Mr Reeves and Mr Stiffin have provided excellent administrative, learning and pastoral support and we wish them well in future.

We are fully staffed for next term and we welcome a wide array of talented teachers and staff to the school. Ms Thackrey is joining us as Deputy Headteacher to lead on Inclusion after a decade of leadership experience in London schools. Mr Charmokly joins us as Director of Science and Ms Tan returns from sabbatical as second in science. Geneticist Dr van Erp brings a vast array of industry experience to the science team. In English, Ms Carr returns to Verulam to be Director of English after a decade of experience at another Hertfordshire school, joined in English by Miss Kahn and Miss Braccia. In Mathematics, the faculty will be led by the highly experienced Mr Hardy. Mr Moseley joins us as Head of Drama, most recently at Berkhamsted School. Mr Cope joins us in Business and Economics, Ms Lancaster in Art and Mr Ahmed in Geography. On our support staff, we welcome Ms Bendahman as PE apprentice, Ms Grant as Pastoral Support Assistant, Ms Khan as Safeguarding and Inclusion Co-ordinator and Ms Bourne as Learning Support Assistant.

Some current staff are changing roles or have received promotions recently. Mrs Cornmell has been appointed as permanent Assistant Headteacher and Mr Pettitt is Associate Assistant Headteacher for the next year. Mr Halsall is Head of Key Stage 4 and Mr Holding is taking a new role as Lead Practitioner in safeguarding and pastoral. Mr Curcic is stepping up to be Head of Religious Studies. The incredible Ms Destickere has moved from the sixth form to be our Exams Officer and will be replaced by Ms Smith. Ms Pettitt has already taken on the role of Librarian.

Wishes for the summer

Finally, I'd like to thank you for welcoming me to Verulam and your ongoing support. It really does take a village to raise a child, and an open and positive relationship with parents and carers is essential for success.

I hope that you have a restful summer (with some summer weather?) and look forward to seeing year 7 and 12 on the 3rd September and all students on the 4th September.

Yours faithfully



Fergal Moane

Headteacher