



Parents' & Students' Newsletter: December 2014

Another one almost over...	1
Staffing news	1
Term dates for 2015-16	2
Winter Weather Warning	2
Considerate parking please	2
Health & Safety – music to your ears...	2
New e-mail and website and Twitter and...	3
Curriculum matters	4
Governors	4
Possible trip to Wylie Memorial High School, India, October 2015	5
Exam Result updates	5
School Funding	6
Job Vacancy	6
School (non-Ofsted) Review	7
Resilience Information Evening Monday 2 February 7.00 – 9.00 pm	9
Building a Brighter Future	9

Another one almost over...

Well done to all of us for getting through the term so successfully – look out for *Highlights* coming home soon. I hope everyone has a great break and returns ready for the delights of 2015 and beyond. It is officially the International Year of Light so let's look forward to a bright future!

Alan Rosen

Staffing news

It is with great regret that I can confirm that Mrs Ellie Thompson is stepping down as Deputy Headteacher. As you may know she has not been well for the last 12 months, and therefore has not been able to carry out her role here at school. You will be pleased to hear that she is now on the mend, but she does not believe she will be fit enough to return to work for many months yet, nor to reach her full capability for some time after that. She is very grateful for the messages of support she has had from members of the school community over the past year. Her departure will be a huge loss to the school as she has made a formidable contribution over the last 11 years. I am sure you will all join with me in wishing her a speedy recovery and saying how much we will miss her.

Mrs Newman left at half term with our thanks for five years supporting Key Stage 4 (after initially joining us to help with our 50th birthday celebrations) and into the post we welcome Mrs Lin Faulkner, who is now the point of contact for matters concerning Years 10 and 11.

Welcome also to Mr Craig Andrews who has joined the IT team as an Apprentice Technician for a year or so.

Term dates for 2015-16

These are almost confirmed...

	First day of term	Half Term	Last day of term	Other days to note
Autumn 2015	Thursday 3 September 2015	26-30 October	Friday 18 December	INSET 1: Tuesday 1 September INSET 2: Wednesday 2 September INSET 3: Friday 9 October
Spring 2016	Tuesday 5 January 2016	15-19 February	Thursday 24 March	INSET 4: Monday 4 January
Summer 2016	Tuesday 12 April (tbc)	30 May-3 June	Wednesday 20 July	INSET 5: Monday 11 April (tbc)

Please note that our dates will not be identical to other schools.

Winter Weather Warning

Our regular reminder about how we may need to deal with 'weather events'. Any decision about school closure will be made as early as possible and put on the AHS and Bucks websites (www.ahsonline.co.uk and <http://closures.buckscc.gov.uk/Default.aspx>). Local radio is also informed.

Parents will receive a Schoolcomms message as and when appropriate and we are likely to use Twitter (so that is another reason to follow @AylesburyHigh...). Some schools have historically had a lower threshold for closure than we have – so please don't assume that one school's decision will necessarily apply to others.

Even if we are able to open, one major factor is whether sufficient home-to-school transport can operate. The transport team often make decisions based on reports back from coaches as they head out to their routes, so typically won't know until around 7 am on days when conditions are marginal.



Considerate parking please



There is apparently a problem occurring in connection with the bus that stops adjacent to Pascal Drive, Medbourne, Milton Keynes. Residents are concerned that parents block the road, creating a risk for children catching the bus. We have received a request to remind parents of the need to be aware that they may be causing a safety issue and to bear in mind the local residents both when dropping and collecting students.

After many years of campaigning, including by our Year 7 students, Bucks have put proposals for Turnfurlong out for consultation. We await the results of that and hope that the work can be carried out in the near future, possibly even February. It will involve changing the parking restrictions at our end of Turnfurlong so that, for example, it is easier for the buses to get through. Further down Turnfurlong and in Fairmile some double yellow lines will ensure that parking does not happen on corners and in places that cause problems on a daily basis.

Health & Safety – music to your ears...

We have had reports of some 'near-misses' involving students and cars on our site when students have wandered across car parks and access roads before or after school with headphones on. It does seem to make you oblivious of the surrounding world so a request to everyone to keep eyes *and* ears open when cars are around.



New e-mail and website and Twitter and...

We have been busy! In early November, all students' school e-mail addresses were changed to enable us to move to Gmail for everyone. Our previous service had been experiencing some difficulties and, after considerable research, we decided that moving a number of our IT services could have some real benefits.

I'm pleased to say that the changeover happened smoothly, and would like to commend students for their co-operation, staff for adapting so quickly to the new set-up and the IT team for their hard work behind the scenes.

We are gradually moving old systems across to benefit from the considerably-improved functionality. Year 11 have already (successfully) used on-line forms to submit their choices for the Sixth Form and Year 12 will also be indicating their Year 13 subjects on-line early next term. All students and staff now have 'cloud' storage through GoogleDrive, and can use Google Docs, Sheets and Slides as well as other apps.

At the same time, we are re-designing our website and fairly soon it will be available at www.ahs.bucks.sch.uk and www.ahsonline.co.uk. In the meantime, have a look at www.ahs.realsmartcloud.com and let us know what you think. There is more design work to be done but the site is already looking good. Of particular note are the Twitter feed and calendar on the front page. Why not follow us on [@AylesburyHigh](https://twitter.com/AylesburyHigh)?

A reminder that our policy on the use of images of people is best described as, "Names without photos and photos without names". If you would not like your daughter's image to appear on our school website/Twitter then please inform your daughter's PSA.

Curriculum matters

As I have previously explained, there are radical changes ahead for both GCSE and A Levels. At the moment the GCSE reforms seem to be proceeding without too much controversy although we are not entirely clear how the next few years will work with some subjects (English and Maths first, from September 2015) using a 9-1 (9 highest) grading system and the remainder still using A*-G. This will have implications for access to post-16 education as, for example, there is no direct equivalent to the present C grade which has traditionally been the minimum to access a course, and schools may well use grade 5 as a higher threshold instead. We are also told that the new GCSEs will be more rigorous but at this stage it is difficult to know if that is rhetoric or reality – will there be more challenging material or simply higher grade boundaries and how well will the new GCSEs fit with new (and old) A Level courses?

For A Level, we have Phase 1 subjects starting in September 2015, for our current Year 11s. Phase 1 subjects have their AS exam *de-coupled* from the A Level, which means that, unlike the present set-up, for those taking the full A Level there is no need to take the AS at all – AS is a standalone qualification and does not count towards an A Level.

So far, so good, and the exam boards have been busy publishing completely revised specifications for Phase 1 subjects, but all of this means that when students apply for university early in Year 13 they will possibly have no AS results to give universities an idea of their potential A Level results. That will require universities to place more weight on GCSE results and school predictions. No university has said that a student will be disadvantaged by not having AS results, but they may well be! The problem is that, while phase 2 and 3 subjects are still running, some university applicants may have four or five AS grades while others have none – it would be surprising if the universities were not tempted to give more offers to candidates who have good grades ‘in the bank’.

To add to the uncertainty, one political party has indicated that it might *re-couple* AS and A levels although it is difficult to see how feasible that is with the election being four months before the new A Levels start.

Some schools have declared their hands already, either saying that no-one will take an AS in a Phase 1 subject (as intended by the reforms), or everyone will take ASs in Phase 1 subjects (to support university entrance). We are not going to make any decisions until the position is much clearer – watch this space – and can defer the final decision until January 2016 if necessary, although I would hope to have it resolved much earlier.

Governors

We are pleased to welcome to the Governing Body Mr Clarke and Dr Weir as Parent Governors and Mr Simpson as a Staff Governor. The full list of Governors is now:

Mrs Trudi Barnes	Parent	Mr Mark Potkin	Staff
Dr Jane Blagg	Parent	Mr Alan Rosen	Head
Mrs Cindy Bull (Chair)	Community	Mr Arthur Sara	Community
Mr James Chandler	Parent	Mr Martin Simpson	Staff
Mr Arfan Chaudhry (Deputy Chair)	Community	Mrs Julia Spencer	Community
Mr John Clarke	Parent	Rev Olusegun Stephen	Co-opted
Mrs Jane Lewis	Parent	Mr Nick Wake	Parent
Mrs Sarah Marsh	Community	Dr Kate Weir	Parent
Mr Dennis Phillips	Co-opted		

Possible trip to Wylie Memorial High School, India, October 2015

We have been invited to send another team to Ludhiana in the Punjab next Autumn, to take part in a dance festival similar to the two that we have previously enjoyed in 2007 and 2010. Arrangements are still being worked on but we will be looking for a dozen students from a range of years who can represent the school and strengthen the link with Wylie, which has been in place since 2003. More details will be available early next term.



Exam Result updates

You may recall that we have been challenging our GCSE English Literature and AS History results for the past three months. Both subjects ended up having complete re-marks for one and two papers respectively, with considerable changes to the grades (*original figures in brackets*):

English Literature GCSE	A*	A	B	C		
183 candidates	39% (22%)	46% (46%)	15% (27%)	(5%)		
History AS	A	B	C	D	E	U
52 candidates	21% (8%)	52% (50%)	14% (27%)	10% (10%)	2% (4%)	2% (2%)

It has been very disappointing that the exam boards have struggled (again) to provide timely and accurate marking but our experience is by no means unique. Ofqual (who are charged with overseeing the whole process) have said that marking quality is not good enough but have not been very specific about how they can secure improvements.

On a brighter note, we are starting to receive the government's analyses of our exam results for 2014 (which apart from anything else are used by Ofsted to provide alerts of schools causing concern). While we would expect to do quite well on raw scores, because of the selective nature of the school, it is the value-added measures that show whether or not we are doing a good (or outstanding!) job.

I am pleased to report that our KS2 to KS4 Value Added scores for the students' Best 8 GCSEs and for each of English, Maths, Science, Languages and Humanities are ALL significantly positive. In other words, students are really benefiting from coming here – and it's nice that the national statistics confirm that. As examples, the Best 8 VA score for AHS is 1033 (1000 is average for England) and puts us in the top eight percent of schools in the country; Science VA puts us in the top 5% of schools. Equally pleasing is the performance of students in receipt of Student Premium funding who actually outperformed the rest of the cohort. We will be able to compare ourselves with other schools next term when the Performance Tables are updated.

School Funding

In March the Government acknowledged that some schools have been consistently under-funded and pledged £350m to address this for 2015-16. Following consultation and some re-calculations, the amount was increased to £390m but even with this additional funding it was admitted that it would not be sufficient to enable every student up to the age of 16 to be funded at what was, in 2013-14, the average funding level across the country (before area cost adjustments which provide more money for areas such as London).

It may be surprising that, as an academy, our finances are tied into the local authority schools but that is the case. As a secondary school in Bucks, we have been hit for a long time by the relatively low funding that Bucks has historically received, compounded by the way that Bucks has allocated its money which has meant that a significant proportion of the money that should be getting through to our students isn't doing so. At the same time, reductions in post-16 funding, normal inflation, pay awards and the transfer of a number of functions to us that were previously funded elsewhere have put our budget under real pressure. Figures for 2014-15 are not yet available but, for 2013-14, we were probably the second lowest-funded (secondary) academy in the country (comparative figures for maintained schools are hard to find but that is likely to be our position across all schools). Seven of the ten lowest-funded English academies are in Bucks.

Work has been undertaken to decide how to allocate the additional money that Bucks is receiving under the DfE's Fairer Funding initiative. In round terms, if AHS received the amount that the Government believes we should be receiving, we would gain over £500,000 from the new money each year, but a combination of factors including the decision by Bucks to not follow the DfE funding methodology has meant that we may receive just over £200,000 in September 2015. This will be most welcome but it in no way covers the decrease in our funding in recent years, nor gets us anywhere near the 'Fair' levels that the DfE are expecting.

The (present) Government has agreed to look at a National Funding Formula in the next Parliament but, if implemented in the way that some local authorities have requested, this may leave the local authority with discretion to divert money away from certain sectors (such as mainstream schools) and perpetuate the present unfair system.

Job Vacancy

We have a temporary vacancy for a Reprographics Assistant from January to August 2015. The post involves operating the school's photocopiers and running a reliable and prompt service providing resources for subject teams and the wider school. A reasonable level of IT proficiency will be needed as some of the work is provided by e-mail and may need manipulation before printing. Training on the machines will be provided.

22 hours per week on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, Pay Range 1, point 10.

If you are interested, please complete the application form on the school website and return to secretary@ahs.bucks.sch.uk by midday on Monday 5 January.

School (non-Ofsted) Review

In November we invited an experienced Ofsted inspector to visit us for two days to give us some feedback on how we are doing. It involved lesson observation, work scrutiny, student and staff focus groups and discussion with the Leadership Team and Governors. This was 'free' as it was organised by the Buckinghamshire Learning Trust (which runs the School Improvement Service in Bucks now). All maintained schools in Bucks are being visited and academies (like us) can choose to have the review if they wish. Since our Ofsted inspection was two and a half years ago, we thought it would do no harm to have a fresh pair of eyes look at us, not least because the Ofsted framework evolves constantly and we need to know that we are still doing our best and where we need to focus our efforts.

We are very pleased with the report as it confirms that we are going in the right direction and validates the Improvement Plan and how we want the school to develop over the next few years. The report called us an exemplary school, which is a real tribute to the commitment of staff, governors, students and parents.

Here are some extracts from the report:

<p>Student Achievement</p>	<p>Outstanding, because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students make or exceed expected progress, including the small number of SEND/Student Premium (There is a display board in the foyer area celebrating successful people with additional needs, including staff members). • A student said the best thing about the school was the way we “get help if we need it” and gave a long list of examples of the ways in which staff, in her lessons, had adapted their teaching to help students with special needs. • Fabulous literacy across the curriculum evident throughout the school, in lessons, in the excellent library, in displays in classroom and corridors, but mostly in observing and talking to the students. The students write and speak and listen a lot. The staff said “The girls generate a lot of marking” [and marking clearly takes up a significant amount of time]. Poems and prose evident in corridors throughout the school. • There is a high level of thinking and speaking skills very evident in observing lessons • Clearly focused on the whole child and very high levels of personalization • The school’s plans for changes to the Curriculum and Accountability Framework are well advanced and have been outlined to staff in the Head’s welcome presentation at the start of the year.
<p>Quality of Teaching</p>	<p>Outstanding, because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very high expectations and a professional working environment • Excellent subject knowledge and work ethic. Staff have a moral purpose and take pride in “making a difference” • Teachers “go the extra mile”, according to the girls, who feel that they are well supported. T • The environment for learning is excellent. Despite relatively low levels of funding the facilities are constantly updated. This year ambitious plans to refit 8 science labs. Classrooms, corridors, the canteen and library are all very appealing and tidy. Excellent displays for learning (toads and lizards and plants in the biology lab, exemplar work in design displayed outside the D&T classrooms. • The evidence leads to the observation that the school's evaluation is precise and accurate about the typicality of the quality of teaching. • Students’ exercise books and folders show the impact of teaching on student progress.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older students act as “subject ambassadors” to younger students (There is a display with photos in the sixth form foyer) One student said, “I volunteered to help in Physics lessons, but it actually helped me to understand Physics better!”
Behaviour and Safety	<p>Outstanding, because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The girls are very happy • Brilliant learners, impeccable behaviour in and out of classrooms • Excellent attendance, punctuality, maturity, politeness, manners • The standard of uniform is excellent...sixth form students able to dress like FE students and really appreciating the chance to express their individuality • Positive feedback from students, parents (in school bi-annual surveys) and staff • The students are very articulate and speak highly of the guidance and support they experience • Many opportunities to support others and develop leadership skills - SHARE, subject ambassadors, leadership in PE, music, art, dance, DoE • Students feel very safe, have go-to people, know clearly where and how to access support/excellent links with outside agencies, such as TAMHS, as well as excellent in school support. • The school has sent a member of the leadership team on a five day training course and look to adopt the Penn Resilience Programme.
Quality of Leadership and Management	<p>Outstanding, because</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of achievement – all groups [including] PP/SEN • Excellent provision for small number of special needs • Ambition - School Improvement Plan illustrates absence of complacency • Not an exam factory • Governance very effective - committed chair/governors observing lessons/link governors • Relentless focus on improving teaching-CPD, learning lunches, appraisal, SIP, effective review system Quality Assurance • Brilliant curriculum - no NEETS, huge levels of pleasure, good Information, Advice and Guidance • Support for local schools including Head serving on the Interim Executive Board of a junior school • Sound financial management-excellent development of resources for learning/facilities
Overall Effectiveness	<p><i>Outstanding, because other aspects are outstanding</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is outward looking • Best practice in teaching is spread very effectively. • The broad and balanced curriculum serves the needs of the girls really well. The girls’ choices at GCSE and A level drive the timetable, not the other way around. All girls are considered able and provision for the most able (eg lunchtime classes to prepare Oxbridge applications) is open to all. • The quality of display is superb throughout the classrooms, corridors, library and entrance hall celebrating the outcomes of the students’ learning, but also giving a clear message that it is great to be a woman and many displays about inspiring women throughout the school. • Lots of student-led notices about fundraising and volunteering. The students said that one of the things they most liked about their school was “It promotes the idea it’s okay to be female and successful”. • SMSC clearly runs throughout the school/assemblies /volunteering/displays.

Resilience Information Evening Monday 2 February 7 – 9pm

Three of our staff have recently undertaken specialist training to deliver The Penn Resilience Programme to Year 7 students, which will start next term during L4L lessons. The aim of the programme is to help young people learn from difficult situations, develop emotional awareness and intelligence and reduce anxiety whilst aiding concentration. A three year study led by the London School of Economics, looked at Year 7 students following the PRP in 22 schools from Hertfordshire, Manchester and South Tyneside and the results showed it was very successful in building the emotional resilience of young people. If you are interested in finding out more about the programme please look at the following link: <http://howtothrive.org/young-people/education/>

We are very keen to share some of the very useful strategies in the PRP with parents and will be holding a Resilience Workshop on **Monday 2 February from 7 – 9pm**. Lucy Bailey, a Penn Resilience Programme trainer from How To Thrive, will cover key factors that have an impact on resilience and how parents can help children (and themselves!) deal with setbacks and develop resilient thinking habits. We will need to make a small charge of £3 to cover costs, but hope that you will be able to attend. Tickets are available on Parent Pay and are open to all parents, not just the parents of Year 7, as parents of older children will also find the techniques very useful in encouraging resilience in their children.

Building a Brighter Future

Despite our relative shortage of money, we are determined to use what we have to maintain AHS as a great place to work and study. The priority for 2014-15 is to undertake a major refurbishment of Science but we can't do it without you!

Parents will have received a copy of the brochure in the past few weeks either by post or at a school function, and many thanks to those who have generously made a donation already.

This is a plea to have another look at the brochure, to speak to your daughter about the relative merits of the older labs against the newer labs and see whether you can be persuaded to contribute to the project. Our aim is to have all labs updated with modern science equipment and furniture, replacement windows, roof, lighting and heating; in short a complete transformation.

If we can gather together sufficient funds we will be able to carry out the work this summer, so everyone who will be here next September will benefit in their Science lessons. With a shortfall we will face the prospect of some labs having to be deferred.

So please do have another look at the brochure (<http://www.ahsonline.co.uk/Fundraising> and <http://ahs.realsmartcloud.com/2015-development-campaign/>) and see if you could return the donation form.

If you need further persuasion, it's worth bearing in mind that the great facilities that students are enjoying now are the result of generosity by previous generations of parents, so, if your daughter enjoys the Library, Sixth Form Centre, Sports Hall, and many other areas of the school, then please do find the form and send it in.

Thank you!

