



# Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School

Headteacher: Mr A Wood BA (Oxon), PGCE, MBA, NPQH  
Woods Avenue, Hatfield, Herts AL10 8NL T: 01707 275331

Email: [admin@bishophatfield.herts.sch.uk](mailto:admin@bishophatfield.herts.sch.uk) Website: [www.bishophatfield.herts.sch.uk](http://www.bishophatfield.herts.sch.uk)

BHGS is a company limited by guarantee Company number: 07831507 Charity number: EW01517



28th March 2024

## Newsletter - End of Spring Term

Dear Parents/Carers,

Last week I attended the Hertfordshire Association of Secondary Headteachers Annual Conference. This is always a great opportunity for colleagues from across the County to meet and learn from one another, as well as to benefit from some interesting and often inspiring guest speakers. I am always struck by the extraordinary levels of commitment to ensuring that all of our pupils, in all of our schools, get the best possible experience in their education. A number of issues are particularly pressing currently and I will touch on some of them in this newsletter. However, I feel that I must share with you what is the most concerning issue facing all schools: funding.

Every single headteacher that I spoke to (I'm not sure I spoke to all 64 attendees, but I got close) expressed their concern, frustration and in many cases desperation at the financial pressures they are under. I am sorry to say that these pressures also apply to our school. We have faced significant increases in our costs over the last few years: salaries, contracts, energy bills, subscriptions, resources etc have all risen substantially. The funding we receive from the government has not remotely kept pace with this. We have calculated that this year alone we have a shortfall of around £185,000 in our funding. Projections for next year suggest that things are likely to get more challenging. Due to the prudent management of our budget over many years we are fortunate in having some reserves which enable us to balance our budget. However, this is not a sustainable position. With an election looming, I would urge you to lobby those who may be aiming to win your vote for a commitment to properly funding our schools. I have myself written to Grant Shapps as our local MP and to Gillian Shepherd the Education Secretary to raise my concerns. I am sorry to say that neither showed any real appreciation of the difficulties we and all schools are facing. We all need to be aware that, unless things improve, all schools will be forced to make some very difficult decisions about what we are able to provide.

I would like to thank those parents who have supported the school with financial contributions. These do make a huge difference and it has been particularly welcome to see so many parents make additional contributions to trips and visits to help fund places for other pupils. We will be exploring other ways to encourage financial contributions and in the meantime please do look at the 'Support Us' page of our website for ways to donate [Supporting The School – Bishop's Hatfield Girls' School](#).

*"Pupils flourish and support each other to succeed"*



## Free School Meals

We know that many families have suffered financial difficulties in recent times. You may be eligible to apply for Free School Meals (FSM) for your child(ren). You can check your eligibility here [Free school meals](#) and we strongly encourage parents/carers to apply if they are eligible. The funding is allocated to a pupil's WisePay lunch account and so they simply use their thumb to pay for lunch, alongside everyone else. Even if this is only required for a short period of time it is still worth applying as this will trigger Pupil Premium funding to the school which can be used to subsidise things like school trips and visits, books and equipment and uniform. Please contact the school if you need help with an application.

## Catering

Thank you to those of you who took the time to respond to our catering survey in January. We have been in discussion with our catering contractor, Aspens, who have agreed to widen the variety of food on offer to include salads and other healthier options. We also welcome our new Chef, Peter Avraam, who is working hard to improve standards. At the same time we have been reviewing the financial situation and tariffs given the rising cost of food and wages. The school has been subsidising the service including funding the FSM top up cost and will continue to do so next year despite financial pressures. However, having kept tariffs fixed for over a year, we regret that Aspens will have to implement some small increases including on the daily meal deal which will be £2.70 next term. The meal deal offer is still excellent value as pupils may purchase a main course / jacket potato / pasta pot / Just sandwich with vegetables / salad and a dessert / tray bake / piece of fruit. Please see the catering page of our website for menus and other information.

## Admissions

Secondary school allocations took place a few weeks ago and you may have read in the press about the pressure on school places in some areas. Bishop's had around 500 applications for 155 places, with around 220 of these placing Bishop's as first choice. I am told that we are one of the most oversubscribed schools in the County. We have also had a record number of appeals for places already this year. I have had a number of queries from parents and prospective parents as to whether there is any likelihood of us increasing the size of the school in order to enable more pupils to come here. I have always said to the Local Authority that we are open to discussions around increasing our intake, but that we simply cannot fit any more pupils into our current building. It is unlikely that the Local Authority will commit the necessary funds to provide more buildings, so for now our numbers are capped. I know that this leads to a lot of disappointment from those who do not secure a place here, but there is little we can do.

## Vaping

I wrote to you earlier this term about the widespread concerns about children vaping. If you missed this letter then I would urge you to read it here [Vaping letter Feb 2024 - Joint letter Secondary Headteachers](#). Unfortunately vapes seem to be easy to get hold of, despite it being illegal to sell them to under 18s, and many of them are branded to target children. I am very concerned about the potential health risks to children from vaping and would ask you to speak to your child about this. Vapes are not always easy to detect, but please try to be vigilant at home. This NHS site has some really helpful information and would be a good starting point for a discussion with your child - I recommend that you have this discussion, even if you think that your child does not vape [Young people and vaping - Better Health - NHS](#). There is also a very good recent 30 minute documentary on iPlayer: [Jordan North: The Truth About Vaping - BBC iPlayer](#). I must also remind you that anyone caught vaping, in possession of a vape or being part of a group

possessing a vape or vaping will be issued with a suspension as stated in our Actions and Consequences.

## **Uniform**

As we move into the summer term I am giving the usual reminder about uniform, make-up and jewellery. The vast majority of our pupils adhere to our expectations really well. Please do support the school by:

- not allowing your child to get a nose piercing or multiple ear piercings, until they join the 6th Form
- not allowing them to have nail extensions or eyelash extensions
- not allowing them to dye their hair unnatural colours
- ensuring that they have skirt of an appropriate length
- not allowing them to wear items of jewellery apart from a watch

We will confiscate items that are not permitted and on rare occasions have had to send pupils home if they do not comply with our expectations. This can be both embarrassing and inconvenient for parents/carers.

## **Blemish stickers/patches**

A few pupils have asked if they can wear these patches in school but they are not permitted. There is very little evidence that they actually work and unfortunately a few pupils have decided that they are something of a fashion accessory. We will be asking pupils to remove them and if this has to be done repeatedly then we will sanction accordingly.

## **Attendance**

I would like to remind you of our expectations in relation to pupil attendance. Often as we move into the latter half of the summer term we receive a number of requests from parents and carers to authorise additional days of holiday due to trips or flights being arranged before the school term has come to an end. Please can we remind you that these requests will not be authorised. We believe it gives an important message to the pupils that at Bishop's we take advantage of all the learning time we are allocated. This does not change as we approach the end of the school year. Our staff continue to prepare and deliver high standards of learning in the classroom right up until the end of term and there is a risk that if pupils do not attend school for those last few lessons of the year then they may miss out on quality learning opportunities. On a more positive note a number of our pupils have received praise letters home this term, as well as receiving Attendance Certificates, to recognise the efforts they have made to improve their levels of attendance. Thank you for your continued support with ensuring your daughter has high levels of attendance. The government has given attendance a high priority and you can read about their latest guidance here: [Why is school attendance so important and what are the risks of missing a day? – The Education Hub](#)

## **Communication with school**

The partnership between home and school makes all the difference to our pupils' successes and we do our very best to build positive relationships with everyone in our community. Unfortunately we seem to be increasingly living in a world where people are quick to blame and judge others' actions, without pausing to think. We have had a few occasions recently where parents/carers appear to have come to a hasty decision that their child (or another child) has been 'wronged' and to contact the school to make accusations. All pupils will have good days and bad days at school

and research shows that the teenage brain is often emotional rather than rational. No doubt on occasion these emotions will be played out at home, with your child complaining about or criticising things that have happened at school. There will also be times when this is an attempt by the child to deflect from something they have themselves done wrong. It is often very tempting to jump in to try to fix these problems or to place blame. Obviously it is very important that you listen to your child. However, when taking their account do please consider that this may not be the full story and I would urge you to pause before accusing the school or staff of mishandling things. We can only resolve problems if we work together and jumping to conclusions about what has happened purely based on what your child has told you is not supporting the school but potentially undermining what we do. This can also cause some embarrassment to parents when they become aware of the full story. There will inevitably be times when staff get things wrong, just as we have all made mistakes as parents; we are humans not robots. The best way to resolve issues is to work with us, not against us, so please bear this in mind in your communications with the school.

### House Competition

The latest scores are (there is plenty to play for with lots of points available in the Summer Term):

Austen	19863 House Points
Franklin	19680 House Points
Hadid	19376 House Points
Parr	17982 House Points
Seacole	19080 House Points

And special congratulations to the following pupils who have the highest number of points in their year:

Year 7	Katie Claridge 7Se
Year 8	Siena-Maria Musso-Hall 8Au
Year 9	Babara Idowu 9Au
Year 10	Erin Wilcock 10Pa
Year 11	Jessica Dunnington 11Au
Year 12	Jasmine Lota 12Fr
Year 13	Esme Wallace 13Fr

### Safeguarding Update: Pencil sharpeners

At Bishop's we are committed to maintaining the highest possible culture of safeguarding. Having taken advice from a number of sources and listened to practise at other schools we have decided to no longer allow pupils to bring pencil sharpeners into school from the start of next term. Appropriate equipment will be available for borrowing in classrooms. Staff will be confiscating pencil sharpeners that are brought in and we cannot guarantee that they will be returned due to the practicalities involved. We therefore ask that you remind your child to remove any pencil sharpeners from their pencil case over the holiday.

We return for the Summer Term on **Monday 15th April with the usual 8.35 am start time**. I know that our staff are looking forward to a well-deserved break after rising to all the challenges of the term and I am sure you will join me in thanking them for their efforts.

As ever, if you have any feedback please do email the school admin address; I am not always able to reply to each response individually, but all comments are noted and acted upon where appropriate.

Best wishes to you and your family for the holiday. I know that many of you celebrate religious festivals at this time of year and would like to wish everyone the very best in their celebrations.

Mr A Wood  
Headteacher