

# Meopham School

A Member of Swale Academies Trust

Headteacher: Mr E Roberts BA Hons. PGCE NPQH



Wrotham Road Meopham Kent DA13 0AH

Tel: 01474 814646

Website: [www.meophamschool.org.uk](http://www.meophamschool.org.uk)

13 December 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you've all had a lovely week and you are getting into the festive spirit! Just one more week until the Christmas Break but still lots going on at Meopham School.

## Well Done

Congratulations to the following students who received Headteacher Commendations this week:

**Elsie G (Y9) - Science** - Fantastic engagement, effort and work created from a comprehension task regarding the Chernobyl disaster. Her work has been fantastic.

**Sally I (Y9) - Art** - Christmas Card Competition WINNER!

**Perry-Junior H (Y9) - Geography** - Excellent Memory Retrieval Task at the start of the lesson.

**Lily R (Y10) - Geography** - Beautiful Geography book and dedication to accuracy.

**Jack H (Y9) - Student Leadership** - For coordinating the Thank you Teacher postcards.

**Charlotte B (Y10) - Health and Social Care** - Always giving her best efforts in her work, especially the recent homework.

**Priya A (Y10) - Health and Social Care** - Always giving her best efforts in her work, especially the recent homework.

**Alex H (Y9) - Music** - Excellent film music composition.

**Ella T (Y9) - Music** - Excellent film music composition.

**Preston M (Y9) - Music** - Excellent film music composition.

**Lainey O (Y9) - Music** - Excellent film music composition.

**Laeticia S (Y7) - Music** - Excellent performance in the Christmas Cracker.

**Freya M (Y7) - Music** - Excellent performance in the Christmas Cracker.

**Eliza K (Y9) - Textiles** - Excellent work on wet felted landscape.

**Jasmine S (Y9) - Textiles** - Excellent work on her wet felted landscape.

**Freya H (Y9) - Textiles** - Excellent wet felted landscape produced.

**Ella T (Y9) - Textiles** - Excellent wet felted landscape.

## Cultural Capital

Our thanks to **Mrs Williamson** for arranging the fantastic performances of **A Christmas Carol from the Quantum Theatre Company**, who provided performances to both our Year 10 and Year 11 students. As a key text in our GCSE English Literature course, I am sure our students found the production useful to their studies and it also helped to boost the Christmas mood around school!

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Yesterday we also welcomed the charity **Charlie's Promise** into school to speak with our Year 11 and Sixth Form students about the important issue of knife crime. Speaking from first hand experience after losing their son, brother, grandson, nephew and friend, the team use their experiences to show young people how decisions and choices can have severe consequences and ruin lives. It was an incredibly moving event, and we are very grateful to the family for sharing their experiences. The maturity and sincerity with which our students listened to their story was also very commendable. Our thanks to **Miss Hodd** for organising this event. For more information, please visit: <https://www.charliespromise.org/about>

## **Christmas Cracker**

On Wednesday, we welcomed friends and family within the community into school to watch our incredibly impressive **Christmas Cracker** event. This was a really lovely occasion where the Music, Dance, Catering and Performing Arts departments within the school organised an opportunity for lots of our students to showcase their talents. It was an incredibly memorable and well-run evening, the perfect way to begin the Christmas season and a real privilege to experience. I am always amazed with the tenacity and bravery of young people to get up on stage and sing, dance or act their hearts out (why do we lose this bravery as we get older?) and it is fair to say that the audience was full of very proud families and staff. A huge **well done** to all the students and staff involved in the evening, and a special **thank you** to Mr Knight for organising this fantastic annual event!

## **Christmas Dinner**

On the theme of Christmas, we are looking forward to hosting our annual Christmas dinner for students on **Wednesday 18th December**. We hope as many students as possible will join in the celebrations. There may be some slight disruption to lessons on that day, but it is a lovely opportunity to come together as a school, get the cheesy Christmas music on and get into the spirit of the season.

## **Last Day of Term 2 and First Day of Term 3**

Also a reminder that **school finishes early on Friday 20th December**. Students will be leaving at the end of period 4 (**12.25pm**). Bus companies have been contacted to advise them of the changes to our timings.

A reminder that the first day of Term 3 for students will be **Tuesday 7th January**, as on the Monday we have a Staff Development Day - so students get to enjoy one extra day of the Christmas break!

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## **Sixth Form Taster Day**

Today, Year 11 students have been taking part in our annual Sixth Form Taster Day, finding out about what life is like as a Sixth Former at our school, and experiencing lessons across a variety of subjects. Personally, it was my first opportunity to reintroduce A Level Philosophy and Religious Studies to the Sixth Form curriculum and I am sure like many of my colleagues, it was wonderful to discuss the subjects we are passionate about with students and share our expertise with the next generation of scholars!

We hope many of our students will apply to stay on with us next year as we embark on an exciting new journey within our Sixth Form. We are offering a much wider range of subjects next year, with the ambitious goal that - by the time they leave us at the end of Year 13 - as many of our Sixth Formers as possible will be entering high-level degree apprenticeships, top-third universities or high-level employment in London and beyond.

Applications for Meopham Sixth Form should be made via Kent Choices by **Friday 17th January**.

## **Set Changes**

At times we receive requests from parents/carers to change a child's sets. Whilst we are keen to listen to feedback from parents/carers, and will make adjustments where necessary, set changes will only be made when the school feels it is right to do so *on academic grounds*. It is important for us that students are set according to their ability, so that they can be stretched and supported by their teachers appropriately. *Changes are only made on the basis of academic performance, not behaviour.*

In addition to this, particularly in Key Stage 3 (Year 7-9), student sets are arranged in blocks, which means that changing the set for one subject will directly impact the setting for several others. Finally, we try to ensure that if set changes are needed, they take place at a sensible time, such as the start of term.

If you have any questions or worries about your child's set please contact the Raising Standards Leader in the first instance:

Year 7 and 8 - Mr Bahrawy

Year 9 and 10 - Mr Huggens

Year 11 - Mr Rigglesworth

## **Changes to the Structure of the School Day**

As you will know, a key element of the school's new TRUE values is unity. (TRUE: tenacity, respect, **unity**, excellence). As such, a key goal we have at Meopham School is to foster a greater sense of school community and cohesion.

With this in mind, from January, we will be introducing some changes to the structure of the school day. This is for several reasons:

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- We want the school day to begin with Tutor Time for the entire school. This is a convenient time to allow school messages to be shared with all staff and students. This is especially important for our Year 11 students, who in the run up to their GCSE exams will be able to benefit from a daily Morning Intervention programme to support them in a key subject.
- We want all students to enjoy a shared Lunchtime, which allows us to better organise extra-curricular activities, as well as utilising staff more effectively for Lunchtime duties.
- Each morning, a different year group will have an assembly. This is a great way to start the day, where we get to cover important themes and events, and is a thoughtful moment of reflection before the busy work of the rest of the school day begins.
- Students will be able to address any issues they may have - with uniform, lateness, pastoral concerns, missing equipment etc. - at the start of the day with their Tutor, meaning they do not have to wait until TAC Time in the afternoon to resolve issues they may have.

The new school day will run as follows:

**Tutor Period:** 8.40am-9.00am (Y11 8.30am-9.00am)

**Assembly Day:** line up on playground and register in Tutors

**Period 1:** 9.00am-9.50am

**Period 2:** 9.50am-10.40am

**Break:** 10.40am-11.00am

**Period 3:** 11.00am-11.50am

**Period 4:** 11.50am-12.40pm

**Lunch:** 12.40pm-1.30pm

**Dining Hall:** Y7, Y8, Sixth Form: 12.40pm-1.03pm (**Hatch:** Y9-11)

**Whistle and change-over:** 1.03pm-1.08pm

**Dining Hall:** Y9-11: 1.08pm-1.30pm (**Hatch:** Y7, Y8, Sixth Form)

**Period 5:** 1.30pm-2.20pm

**Period 6:** 2.20pm-3.10pm

**Period 7 (selected Y11s only):** 3.10pm-4.10pm

One important thing we do want to ensure is that all year groups have the time and space to eat their lunch without things being overly crowded.

This is why different year groups will use the canteen at different times during Lunch.

Furthermore, each year group will now have their own designated area to eat with their peers.

If students are very keen to get food, they can use the Hatch outside the new building to get food at any point throughout the whole Lunch.

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We will also be ensuring that different year groups have different areas to line up for their Lunch, ensuring all queues are orderly and students can get their food in a quick and calm manner.

We hope these changes will provide a wealth of new opportunities for our students and will help to make the school day more structured and cohesive for everyone.

## **Skirts**

As many parents and carers will be aware, this week we introduced our new processes for ensuring students wear skirts of an appropriate length. We would like to say a huge thank you to the large majority of parents/carers who have supported this measure by ensuring their child arrives at school in appropriate uniform. Most students are now turning up looking very smart and ready for the school day. We are also grateful for the messages of support from families who are pleased to see we are addressing this important issue.

We appreciate that some students - and even some parents/carers - may disagree with our standpoint that skirts need to be of appropriate length i.e. knee-length. Of course, we are all entitled to an opinion, however I think it is fair to say that we have been very clear with all stakeholders that we intended to address the issue of short skirts. I have mentioned this specifically in nine separate letters to parents/carers, as well as in assemblies to all students, on our television screens around the school site and in messages sent to parents/carers via our My Child at School app.

Schools ensure that skirt lengths of both students and staff are appropriate for a number of important reasons:

- It recognises that our school is a professional working environment, where all stakeholders dress in a way that demonstrates professionalism.
- It prepares our students for the working world, where dress policies are commonplace.
- It ensures all of our students look smart and presentable.
- It provides consistency i.e. fairness for all of our students.
- It ensures no members of our school community are made to feel uncomfortable or vulnerable by others overexposing themselves, whether inadvertently or not.
- It ensures our students are not vulnerable when travelling to and from school.

Since the beginning of the academic year - and even before that - our school uniform policy has stated the following regarding skirts and trousers:

'Plain black straight school trousers (no jeans or fashion trousers) or plain black, a-line, pleated, knee length skirt. No stretch fabric or pencil style skirts. Skirts are not to be worn rolled at the waist.'

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Our policy is very much in line with the uniform policy of other schools locally. Here are some quotations from other local schools' uniform policies:

'The skirt must be level with the back of the knee when standing.'

'Black school skirt (approximately knee length, not short, tight fit, low waist or lycra skirts).'

'To be worn just above the knee and should not be rolled up or tight fitting.'

'Black trousers or black skirt to knee.'

We recognise that some families now require some additional time to purchase new skirts or trousers that are appropriate. As such, **until Tuesday 7th January**, the following process will be in place:

- Staff (overseen by a female member of the Senior Leadership Team) will check that students' skirts are an appropriate length as they enter the school gate and during morning line-ups.
- If a student's skirt is an inappropriate length and they have rolled their skirt up, they will be provided a **red slip** and their name will be recorded. They will be expected to unroll their skirt so it is an appropriate length. They will then be expected to report to Mrs Davies-Lane's Office (Assistant Head Teacher) at Lunchtime, to ensure their skirt is still an appropriate length. If they fail to do so, they will receive a C3 (Lunchtime) Detention the next day.
- If a student's skirt is an inappropriate length but they have not rolled up their skirt i.e. the skirt is too short by design, they will be provided a **blue slip** and their name will be recorded. They will be expected to ensure their skirt is as long as possible. The blue slip will explain that the school is aware of their skirt issue, but that parents/carers have been informed and the skirt will be replaced by the start of Term 3. If staff challenge a student for the inappropriate length of their skirt, the student should show the member of staff their blue pass. The student may still be asked to ensure the skirt is as long as possible.

**From Tuesday 7th January**, we will pursue our originally intended process, as we have outlined over the past few months:

- Should staff feel that a student's skirt is not an appropriate length, one of the following options will be available to students:
  1. Students can rectify the issue with the length of the skirt themselves if they can e.g. if the skirt has been rolled up.
  2. Parents/carers can collect their child from school, take them home to change into appropriate uniform and then return them to school.



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3. Students can borrow spare skirts or trousers from the school uniform store. (The school will be purchasing a wider range of spare skirts and trousers for students to borrow, as we recognise that some of the skirts in our uniform store did not suit all body types).

We have made it very clear since the start of the year that a big part of what we are trying to do as a school is raise standards and expectations, and a key part of this is uniform.

Some people may question why it is that we are so focused on uniform. Surely there are more important things to focus on?

My answer is: yes, there are, and we will get to them. However, we have made it clear what the expectations for our uniform are, and as a clear rule that we have laid out, we expect all students to adhere to it and will continue to work on this until all students do.

One of the first things you learn as a teacher is that you do not carry on with your lesson until all students are listening to and following your instructions and therefore are ready to learn. It is the exact same process at the whole-school level: you expect all students to follow the rules as clearly outlined and, once they do, you can move on to something else. It is important that all students recognise that: a) when we establish a process, we will get it right and we have the tenacity to keep going until we do and b) we have the same high expectations for each and every one of our students.

There are plenty, plenty more things we are aiming to achieve as a school and I am very excited to continue introducing improvements in all aspects of school life that will be of huge benefit to your youngsters, but first, we all need to ensure they get their uniform right.

Should you wish to read our uniform policy, it can be found here:

<https://www.meophamschool.org.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=350&type=pdf>

Thank you all for your continued support.

## **Mobile Phone - Change to Policy**

A reminder that, from January, we will be changing our policy on mobile phones, which will include other devices such as earbuds, smartwatches, MP3 players, headphones, iPads and tablets.

We are doing this for three reasons:

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1. **The Department for Education (DfE) has directed all schools to bring in a phone ban.**
2. **We want to improve students' social skills and wellbeing.** DfE research showed that 44% of parents are concerned about the amount of time their children spend on electronic devices.
3. **We want to reduce bullying and unkind behaviour.** There is now overwhelming research from many countries about the negative impact of the excessive use of social media - both on student wellbeing and academic outcomes.

Students will be able to use their phones on the journey to and from school, however there will be an expectation that phones are turned off and put away in bags when students enter the school site.

In assemblies last week, students were provided support and advice on how this change in policy will be put in place.

Should students be seen with their phone on school site, the phone will be confiscated until the end of the school day and the student will receive a 30-minute after-school (C4) detention. The student's phone will be locked away securely. Parents/carers will be alerted of the detention, which will be sat the same day (unless the parent/carer requests for the detention to be rescheduled to the next day).

After the student has sat their detention, they will have their phone returned. (If the parent/carer has rescheduled the detention, the student will need to hand in their phone at the start of the school day on which they have scheduled to sit the detention).

If a student refuses to hand over their phone when asked, they will be placed in the Student Support Provision (SSP) until they do so. Furthermore, if this continues to be an issue, selected students will be required to hand their phones into Reception at the beginning of each school day and parents/carers will be required to collect the phones at the end of the school day.

We know that some students will find this change challenging, and we will be supporting students through this process.

1. There will be two "phone-free" practice days either before Christmas or in the first week back after the break, where phones will be confiscated if seen, but detentions will not be given during this practice phase. We may extend this phase if needed, to ensure that students are fully accustomed to the change in policy.
2. Students who require their phones for medical needs - such as diabetes - will be allowed to use their phones and be given a pass.
3. Students who have an issue at home or anxiety, and wish to contact their parent/carer at Breaktime or Lunch, will be allowed to do so in specific, dedicated areas under teacher supervision.



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4. The Meopham Safe Text number will still be contactable before or after school, and a new message box has been installed outside the Safeguarding Office where any student can post a concern whenever they wish.

Our Deputy Headteacher - Mr McQuillan - is providing opportunities for parents/carers to come into school and discuss this change in policy with him, and to answer any concerns or queries you may have. Unfortunately, he was unable to do so this week, but will be providing this opportunity as soon as possible.

This change in the mobile phone policy will ensure we have a happier, healthier school where students have all of the concerns that phones and social media can cause removed. Students will have the freedom from their phones to enjoy their childhood during their school days and engage in more meaningful and sociable activities with their peers. In the long-term, we are sure this will have a hugely positive impact on our young people, whose wellbeing is always at the heart of what we do.

We appreciate your support with this process.

## **Meopham Monthly**

Our Christmas edition of the Meopham Monthly was published this week. See here for all of the great pieces that have been put together by our students for this festive edition:

[Meopham Monthly December 2024](#)

## **Moving Forward**

As we approach the Christmas break and enter the winter months, we know some may be tempted to take days off when they're not feeling 100%. However, every day is a learning day at Meopham School, so it is important our students are in every day until the end of term. Of course, we have some lovely Christmas bits going on throughout next week, but ultimately the school is a place of learning and the education of our students is, as you would expect, our primary focus right up until the last day of term.

Watching the Christmas Cracker this week, I was so proud to see so many of our students displaying such talent and participating in the wider life of the school. Education is of course important but we are also more than that - we are a community, and as I spend more and more time at Meopham, I am so happy to be part of school life and to be learning about all the wonderful things that go on around school.

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I will write to you again next week to wish you a Merry Christmas but, until then, have a great week - and don't crack open the Christmas chocolate too early!

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'E Roberts', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Mr Roberts  
Headteacher