



# Longsands Academy Newsletter

[www.longsands.cambs.sch.uk](http://www.longsands.cambs.sch.uk)

## From the Headteacher

September 2013  
at Longsands...

A warm welcome back after the summer break to all students and especially those in Year 7 who have joined us this September. I hope that the summer break has afforded students, parents and staff the opportunity to fully recharge their batteries for the academic year ahead. Can I take this opportunity to thank all parents for their strong support of our push on the BASICS and especially uniform. First impressions are of a very smart return to school. The parents of any individual students causing concern have been contacted.

As outlined in my message in the July newsletter, 246 parents completed the parental survey. This is a relatively low number when one considers that there are over 1800 students at the Academy. Thank you to all who took the time to give feedback via the survey. The overall picture is strongly positive. As parents, you are happy with the ethos of the Academy (81%) and there is a very strong agreement that students are happy (91%), feel safe (93%), have good relationships with teachers (84%) and other students (88%). Parents agree that their son/daughters have a balanced learning experience (81%), are being taught at an appropriate pace (72%) and are making progress (80%).

The parental survey also clearly indicated that parents felt there is a need to focus on the following areas:

- ◆ the use of the VLE;
- ◆ communicating with parents on literacy strategies that are currently being

- implemented;
- ◆ the setting of homework;
- ◆ the mentoring system.

I have instigated a review of the above four areas and throughout this half term parents will receive updates on the additional work we are doing in each area, feeding back directly how parents can have an active role in supporting each of these areas.

Feedback from parents is hugely important to us at the Academy. To reinforce my earlier messages, we are very much *'all in it together'*.

I am looking forward to the academic year ahead. I ask that students continue to display their positive attitude to learning and in their partnership approach with staff, and I am confident that all students will continue to make strong progress towards achieving their true potential.

**Mr R Carroll**  
Headteacher



## parentview.ofsted.gov.uk

Parentview, launched last year, is an on-line questionnaire, which allows parents/carers to give views on their children's school.

Parentview asks you for your opinion on twelve aspects of Longsands Academy, from the quality of teaching to preventing and tackling bullying.

As part of our on-going evaluation cycle, results from Parentview will allow me to monitor how parents/carers see our school and play a key part in our commitment to help continue to improve Longsands Academy.



Longsands Road  
St. Neots  
Cambridgeshire  
PE19 1LQ

Telephone: 01480 35 35 35

E-Mail: [enquiries@longsands.cambs.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@longsands.cambs.sch.uk)

# Learning and Teaching Update

## Homework

Developing good homework habits plays a crucial part in your child's progress. Just as importantly, it develops the independent learning skills that continue to be important in ensuring that students leave Longsands not only with a great collection of examination results, but also equipped to be effective lifelong learners long after formal education has finished.

However, it is important to be aware that homework does not always involve the traditional activity of completing written tasks in exercise books. Whilst such tasks still have an important role to play in supporting and extending student progress, homework comes in a variety of forms, often consolidating and extending classroom learning in ways that involve reading and thinking, as well as writing.

Many students tell us they enjoy and perform well in tasks that extend learning creatively and when they have some choice of task. Often teachers want students to play a key role in leading learning in the next lesson, by researching topics for themselves, or thinking about and planning their lesson ideas and opinions in readiness to communicate with confidence in the next lesson.

The following list, whilst not exhaustive, gives a flavour of some of the types of homework your child is likely to experience. But, whatever task is set, asking your child to explain it to you and sharing what they are doing, or planning, makes for a highly effective home-school partnership. We appreciate any support you can offer.

- ◆ *Reading* - many students read regularly in tutor time and English lessons, but the more fiction, websites, newspapers and magazines they read at home the more accomplished their literacy skills become.
- ◆ *Research* - find out about and report back on a topic.
- ◆ *Preparing a presentation* for class – sometimes this involves using IT.
- ◆ *Making something* - from a poster about the dangers of smoking for Science, to a volcano for Geography.
- ◆ *Consolidating learning* – sum up a concept in 10 bullet points, create a set of revision notes.
- ◆ *Preparing for a controlled assessment, or test* – dates for these are published in advance and students are often provided with clear details of what is being assessed and what examination boards are looking for.
- ◆ *Interviewing* people ready to report back findings.

Finally, this year Miss Bell is developing additional resources and activities to support independent study on the Academy VLE, to challenge and extend gifted and talented students. You will receive more information in the next newsletter.

Mrs C Chilman, Assistant Headteacher: Learning and Teaching

## Just a note ... from the Music Department



### Instrumental Tuition

I am pleased to inform you that instrumental teaching is up and running once again. Tuition is provided by our dedicated team of visiting musicians and takes place during the school day.

If you would like your son/daughter to take advantage of this opportunity or would like further information, please request an information sheet from the Music Department.

Lessons are available on woodwind, brass, string, percussion instruments as well as voice and guitar. If you would like further information regarding tuition, and potential financial support with the cost of lessons, please do not hesitate to contact either Mr Dack or Mrs Pearcey in the Music Office on tel: 353535.

## News in brief...

### Careers Fair

The Year 8 Careers Fair will take place on 17 March 2014. Should any parents/carers like to support the event and showcase their business/line of work by hosting an information stall, the Academy would welcome any such contributions. Please contact **Miss Cann** at the Academy. Thank you.

### Rowing Success

**Ellie Sadler** was coxswain to **Adam Williams, Ethan Page, Bryce Taylor** and **Nick Shorter** (of Comberton) to win the adult open coxed four event at Cambridge 99 Rowing Club Autumn Regatta earlier this month, beating crews from Wolfson College Cambridge, Sudbury, Broxbourne and King's School Cambridge.

Have a look at the results on:

<http://www.nines.rowing.org.uk/>

Congratulations to all our young athletes.

### Swavesey Science Challenge

The annual Science Challenge took place in Swavesey in July. Six students from Longsands' KS3 - **Benedict Taylor, Siri Muraka, Melissa Quail, Ross Biddolph, Ben Critcher and Brittany Lee** took part. They carried out 3 science challenges, with a royal baby theme, and then a quiz. They all worked really well and we came seventh out of 18 schools, which was pretty good.

Mrs Marsh

# Developing a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)

Throughout the course of the last year, the Academy has been developing a virtual learning environment (VLE). A VLE is a means of accessing resources and sharing information remotely (from home) and has many benefits including enabling students to save work, setting homework, making resources available, collaborative working and communicating, and receiving key messages/information.

Feedback from the parental survey carried out during summer term 2013 indicated that parents had made very little use of or had a limited knowledge of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). The primary reasons for this included: difficulties in logging on (password issues) and the quality and ease of use once logged on.

At the same time, parents were asked about their child's experience of using the VLE and whether they had made use of it during the year. Again, responses were varied.

The growth and success of the VLE has been hindered by the need to overcome numerous technological challenges. For example, at the beginning, it was difficult for students to save work back to the VLE, or to access personal document areas (an essential feature for anyone using a VLE). This was due to security settings beyond our control, and this issue has now been resolved. Also, the Academy has had to overcome some reliability issues

(occasional crashes in software - resulting in students, staff and parents not being able to access resources), which obviously undermine confidence. Therefore, a great deal of work has been done to address this and we believe the system is now more robust and reliable.

Changes for Autumn 2013 - In response to student, staff and parental feedback, the VLE has been radically re-designed and is due to be re-launched during the autumn term to include: a simpler user interface (for students, parents and staff), the ability to upload work and save back to the VLE and the ability for parents to log on to multiple user areas (if they have more than one child) via a simplified secure log on so that s/he can monitor homework, resources or work which is set electronically. More details about how to do this will follow this term.

It is anticipated that developmental work will continue throughout the year continually to improve the VLE (depending upon feedback from the users). This half term, parents will be issued with logging on instructions for the VLE. It is hoped that you will find it useful and any feedback on further improvement will be gratefully received.

**Mr A Rowe, Partnership Director**

## Think Plan Communicate: Literacy Update

Last year saw the introduction of a variety of initiatives: a Year 7 tutor reading scheme, 6<sup>th</sup> Form Student Leadership scheme -Toe by Toe, Book of the Week, Year 9 Able Gifted & Talented and Year 7 - *Thunks* (a spin off from the wider cross town project within St Neots primary schools), were all introduced last year.

Following these successes, we intend to develop further this broad and balanced curriculum, in order to meet the wide range of students' needs and aspirations. This year, in addition to Year 7, the Academy is establishing the silent reading programme with Year 8, who will also participate in the 'Book of the Week' initiative. All students in Years 7 and 8 will spend one tutor time each week reading a book of their choice. You will be able to look at our book of the week podcasts on the Academy website in due course (currently available to students in tutor time). Multiple copies of all books are available in the Academy library. It is hoped that Year 9 Gifted and Talented students will also contribute to the further development of the Thunks initiative within Year 7 Creative Enterprise lessons.

Key Stage 5 students will continue to contribute to the leadership of our creative literacy programme for groups of students in Year 7, initially with the continuation of the Toe by Toe reading programme, and later in the year the strategic development of a Student Mentors Scheme.

Improving literacy is one of the Academy's foci, as there is much evidence to support the notion that "*reading makes you brainy!*".

Here are some of the benefits of reading:

- it develops vocabulary;
- it can increase general knowledge, which helps students do better at school;
- it provides an escape from the day-to-day - fiction can transport the reader to another world;
- it stimulates the right side of the brain and stretches the imagination;
- It is entertaining. The right book can be lots of fun.

In addition to our work on developing independence in reading, there are other developments planned for this year, including spelling programmes, and further updates on the Academy website.

**Miss L Plowman, Assistant Headteacher: Partnerships**

# Mentoring 2013 – 2014

After a successful introduction at the start of last academic year, students will once again engage in mentoring sessions with their Tutor or assertive mentor (KS4 only) on Tuesday afternoons, from 2.45 – 3.10. We see this as a crucial aspect of a student's education with us, enabling the mentor to offer individual advice and guidance on a wide range of issues including academic progress, attitude to learning, involvement in extra-curricular activities, social issues and general well-being. When conducted over a period of time, this is a recognised and proven method of raising aspirations, attainment and outcomes.

In Key Stage 3 students in Year 7 will spend this term taking part in circle time with half their tutor group, attending on alternate weeks (group make-up will vary). This will help establish vital relationships with both the tutor and other students within the tutor group, forming an important support mechanism during students' time with us at Longsands. Students in Years 8 and 9 will start the year with a focus on attitude to learning (ATL) and the BASICS, reflecting on their time so far at Longsands. After half term, Year 9 students will begin discussing option choices and how these will support any preferred careers which the students may have in mind.

In Key Stage 4, a number of students in Years 10 and 11 will be targeted for an assertive mentoring programme where a more intense level of support is needed for the student to make at least expected progress in their GCSEs. This will be delivered by a trained member of the Academy staff and will take place during the regular mentoring slot on a Tuesday. If your son/daughter has been selected for this then you will be contacted with further details. In Year 10, mentoring via the tutors will initially focus on attitude to learning where students will be asked to reflect on their Year 9 summer assessments and discuss how further progress can be made. Year 11 students will reflect on the start to their GCSE courses and discuss revision techniques which will be vital for success this year. In the second half of the term the focus will shift to post-16 destinations where tutors will begin to examine the possible choices open to each student and offer advice on how to explore these options in greater depth.

## Breakfast Club

At the end of the summer term the Academy started a free breakfast club for those students who do not have time to eat breakfast in the morning. The club ran from 8.00 - 8.35 am and proved very popular (even with some staff!). As a result, the Academy is planning a continuation of this club for the foreseeable future. Students can have toast, jam, tea, coffee or squash and can socialise and relax in a calm, supervised area. The Breakfast Club is situated at the back of the Ritchie Hall each morning.

Further details about the mentoring programme have been sent out at the start of the term, a copy of which can be found on the Academy website. The success of any mentoring is dependent not only on the planning process by the key stage teams and the input of the tutor/mentor but also on the approach the student adopts and the value s/he places on the advice and guidance given. Parents/carers can support their son/daughter in this process by helping him/her to prepare for mentoring sessions by discussing possible topics such as the following:

- ◆ Describe what you have done at school that you feel proud of. Why was it important?
- ◆ Where else could you use the skills that you have been learning in lessons?
- ◆ What problems did you encounter when completing a task or solving a friendship issue?
- ◆ How did you solve these problems?
- ◆ Identify three revision techniques which you *could* use. Which work best for you?
- ◆ What do you want to do next at school and/or after you have left school?

I hope that this information helps to clarify both the purpose and content of our mentoring programme. Many thanks for your anticipated support for this aspect of academy life.

Mr M L Paine  
Lead Deputy Headteacher

## Learning Support Update

Two new Teaching Assistants joined Learning Support this September: Mr Hemming, who will work mainly with the PE department and Mr Storey, who is largely in Maths and Science. Miss Stevenson joined us in June, supporting in English, RE, Art and PA/PE.

In the coming weeks, we will assess the reading and spelling of Year 7 students to decide who might benefit from our intervention programmes. Parents will receive a letter detailing this additional provision, if appropriate.

Parents who are concerned about their child's additional needs are welcome to contact the SENDCo, Mrs A. Brodie, by telephone, email or letter.

Mrs Brodie

## Interested in joining our team?

If you are interested in joining our team of examination invigilators, please contact Mrs Marie Todd, the Headteacher's PA, for details and an application form.