



Principal: Richard Corry

Glanville Road
Oxford
OX4 2AU

t: 01865 428200
e info@spires.anthemtrust.uk

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Parent Update Edition 2

Introduction

Welcome to the latest update for all parents, carers, students, and staff. As we enter the final few weeks of the autumn term, we want to highlight all the successes that have happened so far this half term and provide you with a few key messages that are important to note.

There have been some difficulties in the last few weeks with some humanities lessons affected by staff absence, which resulted in eight school days with non-specialist teachers teaching the students in those affected classes. I am pleased to confirm that we have a specialist teacher back in front of all students, with lessons for the remainder of the term being produced by our existing staff and being checked by Anthem's School Improvement Lead for Humanities.

We also had a serious safety issue last week which resulted in a severe sanction for a student. Please can I remind all parents and carers that bringing into school a prohibited item is a serious behaviour incident and can jeopardise any student's place at Oxford Spires. Following this incident, we have invited the police in to speak with all students about prohibited items, and the dangers that can emerge from doing so.

May I remind all parents and carers that we will break up for the Christmas holiday at 12:05pm on Tuesday 20th December and return on Wednesday 4th January 2023

What went well

We had the pleasure of meeting all the students during the first week back in House assemblies, which was my first opportunity to see students across all the year groups. This provides us with the opportunity for students to mix year groups and provide key messages that are applicable to all. The focus was on resettling after the half term whilst being respectful of the importance to each other as the older students prepared for their mock exams. With so many students having friends and siblings in older years, a lot of families are experienced with dealing with exam pressures, and it is important that everyone realises they will all be in a similar situation in future years and to allow those students to sit the exams without distractions.

The Year 11 and Year 13 mock exams were a huge success and allowed students their first formal opportunity in their final year to sit in the exam rooms, start revision programmes that will last until next summer, and understand the dynamics of sitting lots of exams in a short period of time. The students were a credit to all of you and should be applauded for their commitment and conduct throughout the exam period. We were



excited to have the mock results day on Wednesday 30th November for Year 11, to replicate the feeling of receiving their results in the summer. Our LAMDA exam results have also come back with outstanding results. Congratulations to all the Year 11 and Year 13 students that have received fantastic grades

We invited Year 7 parents and carers to a 'Meet the Tutors' evening to provide them with an opportunity to visit the school again and hear from the Year 7 Pastoral team and their child's tutor. Thank you to all that attended that event and for the staff who gave up their time to facilitate the event.

Our enrichment programme continued with sporting success, pantomime rehearsals, the start of our debating competition, an engineering experience at Rutherford Appleton Laboratories and a Sixth Form biology vaccines visit. You will receive more details on each of these in our Christmas newsletter, but I am delighted to announce that the U16 boys' basketball team were victorious in their first National League match last week. Tickets are available for the pantomime 'Cinderella' on Thursday 15th December through ParentPay should you wish to attend.

The Year 13 geographers had a brilliant (although very rainy) 5 days in Somerset collecting data for their NEA (coursework). They spent 3 days learning about different fieldwork techniques and then for the final two days independently carried out their own investigations into interesting topics such as crime in Minehead and the impact of different coastal defences on tourism in the town. Thank you to the staff for giving up their entire weekend to support those students.

The Sixth Form Open Evening on 17 November was full of Year 11 students looking seriously at their futures. A huge thank you should go to all the teachers who took part in the evening, and the Sixth Form team for organising such a successful event. The feedback we have received was entirely positive and hopeful this means lots of student's are considering Oxford Spires for their Post 16 education. Applications for sixth form (via the school website) should be made by the end of January 2023. This focus on careers and future choices goes along with a visit from Mark Massingham from BMW to talk to students about their apprenticeship scheme, and individual careers interviews with Mr Bingham throughout this term.

Year 10 have had a busy time in careers and aspiration work too. A group of 10 students are working with Sapna Shankar from Study Higher to focus on their future success, and another 20 went to Oxford Brookes on 26 November for their Passport Day. Another group are about to take part in a 'Confidence to Argue' programme, run by Oxford University and funded by Study Higher.

INTO University have been working with groups in all years of the school over the last few weeks, including Year 8, who went to Jesus College, Oxford, on 24 November. The



group, who have worked with the Blackbird Leys-based organisation since primary school, began with workshops on future choices in school, and then went to look around the college to find out more about study after Sixth Form.

A Level English Literature students have been taking part in a new initiative set up this term by Dr Watson with Oxford Brookes English Department. Professor Katharine Craik has worked with our Head of Sixth Form to set up a cross-Oxford network offering wider study for those planning on university English applications, or who just want to improve their A level grades. The next session is at Brookes at 4.45pm on Thursday 8 December and will focus on contemporary writing.

Year 13 are currently hearing back from universities after most of the UCAS applications were made in October and November. Oxford, Cambridge, and medical/dentistry students are currently doing mock interviews as they await real ones shortly.

As mentioned in previous letters, we are making efforts to improve the amount of communication we have with our stakeholders. Our Friends of Oxford Spires Academy (FOSA) group meet regularly and have held their first meeting of the year. They have an upcoming second-hand uniform sale on Thursday 8th December at 18:00-19:30 in the school library that you are welcome to attend. Our Chair of Governors, Chris Scrivener, has organised alongside other governors three separate parent forum meetings over the last few weeks. Thanks to all that have attended to gain a parental view of Oxford Spires, with some helpful suggestions on how to improve. Listening to student voice is also important, and we have just completed our second round of student and House council meetings. The student leadership team have presented the student voice to the Senior Leadership Team and the response will shortly be given back to the students through our upcoming assemblies. It is always a privilege to hear from students and thank you to all those that gave up their time to prepare questions or suggest ideas.

What's happening

We have so much more coming up in the final few weeks before the Christmas period. Our House competitions include geography, rugby, dodgeball, and football. We always tell the students to take part in something different so if they have not signed up yet then please encourage them to do so.

Our pantomime will take place on Thursday 15th December, and we will also perform this to local primary schools on Friday 16th December. This is a fantastic enrichment experience for the students involved in either the cast or the supporting crew. We will also take part in the New College debating competition and continue with the English Speaking Union's Churchill competition. There are also a variety of workshops and competitions taking place in subjects such as chemistry, media, art, and English.



The Performing Arts department have been busy recording and preparing their compositions and routines for both their GCSEs and A Level. They have also taken students of GCSE Dance to watch a performance of Sleeping Beauty, as well as the upcoming trip to London for Year 7 students to watch The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe. As a fan of musical theatre, it is wonderful that these trips can once again take place and I would encourage everybody to attend if they can. Good luck to all those students who are attending Oxford Spires over the weekend to work on their music compositions.

We will also continue our parent's evenings by welcoming Year 7 and Year 13 pupils to hear from their teaching staff. For Year 7 this represents the first opportunity to hear from subject teachers as to how their children have settled, and for Year 13 it is important to hear about mock exam performance and the final tips before they take their A Level exams next summer. All students will receive their first report of the academic year just before the Christmas break. If you require any support in understanding it, please contact your child's form tutor in the first instance. We have also invited several parents into to visit our Academic Support space, where a lot of our interventions take place and where the SEN team are based. I am proud of the SEN team's commitment to meeting with you all and highlight how we support your child.

Our Christmas lunch for all students will take place on Wednesday 14th December, further details can be found via this link:

<https://www.oxfordspiresacademy.org/event/christmas-lunch/>

Other items

Meinou Simmons (RNU) is a CAMHS Psychiatrist that has issued the following notice.

I am a local Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist, parent and Training Programme Director in my field and have just written a book entitled 'A Guide to the Mental Health of Children and Young People: Q and A for Parents, Caregivers and Teachers' published by Cambridge University Press, which I hope will be of interest to you.

It is designed to be easy to read and informative and covers how you can support children and young people with their mental health as well as explaining a wide range of potential mental health difficulties and disorders. You can check out the contents and sample on the Cambridge University Press website on www.cambridge.org/9781911623915 and can get a 20% discount using by entering the code SIMMONS22 at the checkout.



Final thoughts

May I just take this opportunity to thank all the parents and carers for their continued support for their children at Oxford Spires, and if you need to get in touch, please do so. The Senior Leadership Team roles and responsibilities are listed on our website, and your child's form tutor should be the first option for any day to day issues. Key contacts can be found via the following link: <https://www.oxfordspiresacademy.org/contact/staff-emails/>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rich Corry', is written over a faint horizontal line.

Rich Corry
Principal