

Sixth Form Meeting with Year 10 and Year 11 parents Monday 15th Jan

Thank you all for coming this evening. I invited you to this meeting to discuss our sixth form, something that we as a community are very proud of. We have had great successes in the past with students leaving for top universities, apprenticeships and successful careers. We are at that exciting time of year in Year 13 when university offers are just beginning to come through.

In Year 11 we focus on giving every student the information about all the options they have post-GCSE, and helping to guide them in their choice of what will most suit their talents and ambitions. We also strongly promote the option of staying at school and studying in the sixth form here.

One of the reasons for calling this meeting is to address rumours about the future of the sixth form here. As I said in my letter inviting you to this meeting, the sixth form at Samuel Ward is continuing and we are actively recruiting for this coming September. Those of you with children in Year 11 may well have come to the sixth form open evening we held earlier in the school year.

So far this year we have recruited fewer students for September than we did last year, with that number being lower again than the previous year. Our position is clear – we want Haverhill to have its sixth form. We will continue to offer a sixth form if families and their children take up that offer. This meeting is relevant to both Year 11 students who will be going to a sixth form this coming September, and to the Year 10s who will be going to a sixth form the following September. One aim of this meeting is to gauge likely future student numbers.

In order to provide a suitably varied programme of courses to meet the aptitudes and interests of all sixth form students, there needs to be a minimum number attending the sixth form. In recent years there have been many changes to the way schools, particularly the sixth forms of schools, have been funded. It is now recommended that a school sixth form is viable with a minimum number – some say 200 and some 250. With numbers below that, there are restrictions on the breadth of programmes that can be offered, resulting in the sixth form being subsidised using funding intended for Years 7-11.

We recognise that as well as the sixth form providing a suitably varied offer with a wide range of curriculum pathways. We also expect to provide smaller classes than will have been the norm in the younger part of the school but classes with large enough groups to facilitate lively debate.

As I mentioned earlier, September 2017 saw a drop in our intake numbers, meaning that we now have just over 160 students in our sixth form. Indications so far are that that our numbers will fall further still this September. This means that the number of courses we provide will need to be reviewed if there are not enough choosing a subject for us to be able to run the course. It must be recognised that those who choose not to stay and study at this sixth form have a wide range of options, particularly in Cambridge and Bury St Edmunds, and also further afield.

From September 2019 a new sixth form, Abbeygate, will open in Bury St Edmunds. It will be situated next door to both the existing West Suffolk College and King Edwards School. It will have a new building paid for by the Government that will be added to current buildings in 2019

and 2020. This will be a sixth form of significant size, offering a broad curriculum for students, with a much wider selection of A levels than any individual school sixth form can offer. This new sixth form will provide A levels and will link with West Suffolk College for vocational qualifications, as well as sharing specialist facilities. One of the options that so far is looking more popular than it has historically for our students is for September 2018 going to King Edwards. King Edwards is closing its sixth form in August 2019 and those who have studied in Year 12 there will be the first students in Year 13 at Abbeygate.

We want our sixth form to be full of students who have actively chosen to study with us. However, we also recognise that there are risks to the sixth form in the future and that some students may be put off coming here because of those risks. In order to help mitigate against those concerns we are considering partnering with Abbeygate. By doing this we would align our course offer with theirs with respect to exam board, schemes of work, and even assessments where possible.

This means that in September 2019 the Year 12 students who have joined us this September will have the option to stay with us or to transfer, like the students of King Edwards, to Abbeygate. This new option – on the one hand exciting and different, on the other unknown and not yet built – is one that students are able to keep open as a possibility, whilst attending this school's sixth form. Students can choose our sixth form, safe in the knowledge that the option to join Abbeygate is still open to them at a later date and that it does not need to be decided on now.

In terms of the work we do to make sure there is knowledge and understanding of the possibilities for after Year 11, I will invite the CEO of the Trust who will run Abbeygate to share more information about Abbeygate.

If students select our school as their sixth form this September, we will guarantee their two-year programme. I invited parents of Year 10 students here tonight as I was aware that you might be concerned about rumours about the sixth form, and I was keen for you to hear our thoughts and plans. We know that people want the options for their children to include attending a sixth form here in Haverhill, and that's what we too are working to preserve. We are continuing to plan for the sixth form but we need the number of applicants to go back up. We are actively recruiting for this September and will keep all our predictions under regular review. Please be reassured that if there were to be any changes we would talk to Year 10 parents at the earliest possible stage.

Many of you will know Mrs Senior, who leads the sixth form. I am pleased to tell you that she has begun to put the foundations in place for those interested in Abbeygate for Year 13 but who wish to stay here at Samuel Ward sixth form for the time being. She is now going to tell you more about how that option will work. There is no expectation that students need to decide anything now and options will remain open for the year.

Mark Neild
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