

# Chair's Commentary on the School's year

I have been Chair of Governors at Gillotts school for a year now. My predecessor, Nick Walden, established the principle of writing an annual commentary on the school's year and I have decided to continue with it. So here it is.

## Exams and achievement

The obvious starting point is the exceptional results achieved by our Year 11 students. They are our best ever and the best state secondary school results in Oxfordshire this year. A few of the headline numbers are:

- 81% of students achieved at least five A\* - C grades including English and Maths
- 42% of all grades were A\* or A
- 45.6% of students achieved five or more A\* or A grades and 31.7% achieved eight or more A\* or A grades
- 55% of students achieved the English Baccalaureate

We recognise of course that this was a group of very able students. We have known from the day they arrived in the school that they would do well. However even allowing for their undoubted ability, this is a fantastic outcome. It is a tribute to the school staff that they have enabled these young people to achieve their potential so comprehensively.

I was also delighted to see that 99% of our students achieved five or more A\* - G grades. One of the school's aims is to 'maximise the achievement of each student through effective and inspiring teaching'. Not everyone has the ability to achieve multiple A\* grades. This result shows that the school kept almost all of our students engaged with their education and allowed the less able to achieve their potentials too. I think that is a critical success criterion for a comprehensive community school like Gillotts.

## School buildings

As many of you will know, we have a long standing aim to improve the school's buildings. In pursuit of this goal, we offered up a small part of our land, remote from the heart of the school, to the Neighbourhood Plan. Our hope is that we can sell the land for housing and invest the money in improving the school's sports and teaching and learning facilities.

The original timeline for the Neighbourhood Planning process involved the Henley community voting on the plan about now. However, as a result of a recent decision by the Henley College to offer up its land to the Plan, the vote has been delayed, probably for up to a year. Progress on that front is therefore slower than we all hoped.

As you will know if you have heard me talk about this before, we are confident about our ability to raise the money we need by selling the land because we have a lot of it. We can sell part of our land to raise the money, still meet the Department for Education's 'area of sports fields' requirements for a school our size AND improve our sporting facilities. It really is a win-win-win for the school and its students. However, we have to recognise that the whole process is a bit unpredictable and that we might not be successful so we have continued to pursue two other potential ways to fund improvements.

The first is applying to the agencies the government uses to make money available to academies. Partly through being quick off the mark and partly through the skill and tenacity of our business manager, we have secured a lot of money this way. Many of the improvements have been below ground and so invisible but others such as the facelift for the gym have made a real difference to the look and feel of the school. If I look back five years, the school really does look much better and the risk of having to close due to failure of the heating for example is much less. We will continue to apply for funds whenever possible and to commit them to our prioritised list of improvements.

The other option we are pursuing is local fund raising. As many people have pointed out, there are a lot of high net worth individuals and companies in the Henley area. Of course, one of the reasons these people are wealthy is that they have not given their money away. However, it may be that some of them would be willing to support Henley's community school with donations. We have an ongoing initiative with a couple of local residents to explore the options and see if we can raise enough money to make a real difference to the school in this way.

### **Embracing 21<sup>st</sup> century technology as a learning and communication tool**

As a school, we are committed to taking full advantage of 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to enhance teaching and learning. This year, we have taken a huge step towards achieving that goal by moving to Google Drive. This has multiple advantages; it means that everyone can use the same software, it facilitates collaboration and sharing, it takes care of backup and disaster recovery and it reduces costs. IT transitions always involve pain and ours has been no different but the benefits are so obvious that it is already clear that it has been worth the effort.

The next big step that we will take later this year is to move to a Bring Your Own Device model. Most students carry around a tremendous aid to teaching and learning in the form of a mobile device...and we have been doing everything we can to keep it turned off! Students will be able to use their own devices in support of their learning. When you think about it, it will make a huge difference...videoing their performance in PE...finding out what etymology means without interrupting the lesson...researching the properties of rare earth metals. Of course, it all has to be done without disadvantaging those who do not have ready access to an iPhone 6+ but the opportunity is so huge that it has to be taken. As a man with a weakness for technology, I am enormously excited by the possibilities it opens up.

So to sum up, I feel proud and lucky. I believe I am Chair of Governors at a happy school at which the students really achieve their potential. We have outcomes that put us in the top 20% of schools and tremendous staff, leadership team and governing body. You really couldn't ask for more.

## **Statutory Annual Report to parents on the effectiveness of arrangements for SEN and Disability.**

The school's SEN Policy was last reviewed and amended by the Governors, Headteacher and SENCo in February 2012. Its aims and objectives are set out below.

Gillotts values the abilities and achievements of all its students and is committed to providing, for each student, the best possible environment for learning by:

- ensuring the identification of SEN as early as possible in students' school careers;
- monitoring progress;
- working collaboratively with parents/carers and outside agencies;
- involving students in decision-making;
- personalising learning for students;
- promoting independence;
- ensuring that the responsibility for SEN held by all staff and governors is carried out.

Students with SEN at Gillotts continue to make good progress in all areas of school-life: academic, social and emotional. Of the 20 students on the SEN register, 10 achieved 5 A\*-C, 19 achieved 5 A\*-G, 10 achieved 5 A\*-C including English and Maths. The three students with a Statement achieved 7 or more A\*-C, including English and Maths.

Staff receive on-going support in meeting the needs of students with SEN. Over the past year the focus has been to support and prepare staff (teaching and non-teaching) to understand the implications of the New Code of Practice that came into force on 1 September 2014. Staff continue to receive on-going training sessions in staff briefings / meetings with various foci such as identification of SEN in the classroom, effective differentiation in the classroom, and the importance of text readability in secondary schools.

We have also been proactive in planning for the implementation of the new SEN Code of Practice. We have already reviewed the needs of all the students who were previously designated as School Action and School Action Plus against the new criteria for School Support. The process for transition from Statements to Education and Health Care Plans will continue for some years, led by OCC, but we have already been involved in Transfer Reviews for two students. Anticipating the new Code, and also reflecting the outcomes of an audit we asked the Local Authority to conduct for us, we have radically altered the structure and function of Learning Support, to focus on short term interventions, particularly in English and mathematics, whilst also creating the flexibility to assign support to individual students where and when it is needed.

Evaluation of our examinations results over recent years suggested that students on the SEN register at School Action (the lowest level of need) do relatively less well than those with higher levels of

need (but also more dedicated support). We therefore took the decision, in September 2012, as a whole school, to participate in the Achievement for All programme. We have now completed both years. The programme is run, for the Department for Education, by 3As, a national charity which supports schools to improve the aspirations, access and achievement of learners and young people. The Achievement for All framework seeks to improve pupils' progress, parental engagement, pupil attendance and behaviour, peer relationships, participation in extra-curricular activities and access to future opportunities for pupils. Achievement for All has been shown to have a profound impact on the outcomes of pupils with SEND and on school improvement. We have welcomed the greater clarity it has given us in understanding and meeting individual needs and in fully engaging parents in their child's education.

Gillotts' admissions are managed by Oxfordshire County Council. As an Academy, we publish our Admissions arrangements each year; however our arrangements follow the current published LA admission rules for Years 7 to 11 at community and voluntary controlled secondary schools. A summary of the arrangements, including for pupils with disabilities, is published each year in our Prospectus. Our Accessibility Plan was reviewed and developed further in June 2012, consistent with the National Curriculum Inclusion Statement. Curriculum Access actions include a focus on differentiation. There are lunchtime clubs taking place every day in Learning Support, which support students in developing friendships and social skills in a safe environment. A proportion of staff briefings are used for small groups of teachers to meet with Learning Support Assistants to share strategies to meet an individual's needs. To ensure good Information Access, the school continues to work closely with the LA support services. Our Accessibility Plan (premises) adopted in 2003 was fully implemented by August 2006 and has been reviewed to ensure it continues to meet current requirements.

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Headteacher

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Chair of Governors

