



7th June 2016

To the all Parents/Carers and Students

Dear Parents and Carers

As you will be aware, following negotiations with the Department for Education, it is intended that Ely College will change sponsors on 1st July to join Cambridge Meridian Academies Trust (CMAT). On 20th May, many parents attended a public meeting at the College hosted by local MP Lucy Frazer, at which CMAT outlined our vision for the College and some of our initial plans. The presentation we gave at the meeting is available to view on the College website. For those of you who were unable to attend the meeting, we thought you might welcome an update.

Since March, members of the CMAT leadership team have been working hard to manage a smooth transition. They have been working closely with the existing College team to understand more about how the school is currently run, the opportunities for the future and the short and long-term challenges ahead. As a result of that work, we are confident about that long-term future. Ely College has a rich potential and we are excited about the work ahead and the opportunity to improve outcomes for pupils, families, and for the wider community. Our experience elsewhere in Cambridgeshire gives us the confidence that we can make a difference here and make rapid improvements.

That journey won't be easy, however. The College finds itself in a very difficult position. As you know, results have been disappointing, and these will not improve overnight. As a consequence, pupil numbers have declined, particularly in the 6th form, with a serious impact on the College's finances. In addition, many of the buildings are in poor repair and need immediate attention.

Some of the key decisions that have already been made are outlined below:

Curriculum - We have written to Year 8 parents to inform them that the students will be given some choice over their subjects and begin some GCSEs early from September. Detailed information went home over half term, and an information evening is planned for this evening, Tuesday 7th June 18.00 – 20.00.

Staffing and teacher recruitment - We have undertaken a national recruitment campaign and been working hard to attract high quality staff to key positions in the College, especially in areas such as mathematics where there have been vacancies and shortages this year. We are pleased to have already made some excellent appointments, and are optimistic that these will help us rapidly improve the quality of teaching next year.

Vertical tutoring - High quality tutoring has been key to the success of our academies. From September, students will be organised into smaller, multi-year ('vertical') tutor groups. This is a model that exists in all our schools. When combined with dedicated time for tutors to meet with students, it delivers improved relationships and allows for closer monitoring of their progress and welfare. We know there will be some anxiety and concern from students and parents about this change, so we would like to invite you to an information meeting on Tuesday 28th June from 18.00-19.00 in the new hall to outline plans in more detail and give you a chance to ask any questions you may have.

The House system - From September, the College will be organised into four distinct Houses. All students will be attached to a House and parents will have a dedicated non-teaching point of contact within the House team. In place of the existing 'Heads of Year', each House will be led by an Assistant Principal and a Senior

Tutor. This is a system that has been highly successful in all of our academies, and that enables much clearer lines of communication to emerge. More information on the Houses will be given at the information meeting on Tuesday 28th June.

Uniform - We recognise that to change the uniform entirely in September would place a burden on families and would not give us the time to properly consult on different views. We will therefore be consulting through 2016/17 with a view to a full uniform change in September 2017.

We would, however, like to make a **slight change in September 2016**. As we intend to move to implementing a Houses system in the College, and to immediately smarten students' appearance, we will be purchasing a tie in House colours for each student that we will expect them to wear over a collared white shirt and underneath the existing V-neck sweaters.

Year 9 students next year will be permitted to wear either the grey or navy blue sweaters.

Our advice to parents is, therefore, to purchase the existing school sweaters as normal (on the understanding that they may not be uniform in September 2017), but not to purchase any new polo shirts for September. White collared shirts are readily and cheaply available from most supermarkets or online retailers. Please don't hesitate to contact the College should you have any further questions on this issue.

Behaviour - We expect the highest standards of behaviour and are reviewing the existing policy and approaches closely. Poor or disruptive behaviour will not be tolerated and will be addressed robustly. Parents should expect more information on this in the coming months, but we have placed the improvement of behaviour at the top of our agenda for change at the College.

The Sixth Form - Numbers in the sixth form have declined in recent years, contributing to the difficult financial situation the College finds itself in. Working with the existing sponsor, we have had to make some difficult decisions about the courses we offer next year because of a low number of applications. We believe that there should be a popular and successful sixth form centre in Ely, offering both vocational and academic courses, and intend to work with local partners to shape a re-launched and refreshed offer for 2017. We hope and expect this to attract greater numbers to the College, and to secure an excellent sixth form.

A new Principal - You have already been informed that the current Principal, Evelyn Forde, will be stepping down at the end of the year. CMAT are currently in the process of appointing a new Principal, and will be announcing who that will be very soon.

Most importantly, we are hugely excited about the potential to transform Ely College. There are a great many strengths to build upon, and a huge number of opportunities for growth. The students and parents we have spoken with have all expressed a deep desire to achieve the excellent provision that you all deserve. We are confident that our combined efforts, positivity and energy will secure that rapidly. The pace of change may feel uncomfortable at times, but we would ask you to trust in our track record of delivering change, and to tell us when you have concerns so that we can address them as fully as possible.

We are looking forward to 1st July, when we can fully begin work.

Yours faithfully

The CMAT team

