



February 2017

Dear Parents and Carers

February seems to have been a particularly short month with only fifteen actual school days. I can assure you, however, that those few days have been busy and productive!

We are now half way through the academic year. Thank you for your support in helping us to implement our new behaviour policy. Mrs Casson is currently speaking to each year group in our morning assemblies to remind them of our expectations. You might like to know about some of the aspects she is reinforcing so that you will be able to add your support. These are that:

- Phones must be switched off and out of sight during the school day
- Pupils must not wear make-up, including false tan and false nails/nail polish
- Pupils must not wear jewellery apart from a watch
- Pupils must not come to school with inappropriate hair styles (hair should not be cut shorter than a number 2, hair styles should have no extreme differences in length, there should be no unnatural hair colours or multi coloured hair)

Mrs Casson will also be reminding pupils that sanctions are not a matter for discussion and will be awarded by the teacher as appropriate in line with the academy's behaviour policy.

The vast majority of pupils are of course a credit to their parents and to Ripley and we are extremely proud of them. However, we do need to continue to reinforce our boundaries so that all our young people at Ripley can learn and thrive without disruption in a positive and productive atmosphere.

**Academy security:** As you will all be aware our security upgrade is now complete and in use, without too many initial glitches. I am pleased that it looks smart and enhances the academy rather than making us look too much like a fortress. It certainly does make our perimeter much more secure. I hope you also like the recently erected sign on the new gym – alias the Chocolate Box – which signposts the school well along Ashton Road. Ever onwards - our next project will be to undertake significant repairs to the tower and the roof of the main school building both of which are inevitably showing signs of wear after 154 years. We have put in a bid to the Academy's Capital Improvement Fund and are hoping for some help from them. Over the past few years we have been very successful in obtaining funding from this source for a number of projects. Let's hope they have some money left!

**Music Department of the Year:** As you may have seen in the Lancaster Guardian, Ripley has won the accolade of "Music Department of the Year 2016". We were one of five finalists in a competition sponsored by Classic FM and Yamaha. Mr Gillthorpe and Miss Burtonwood attended the celebration event in London and were thrilled to be awarded the trophy. We are so privileged at Ripley to have such a wonderful Head of Music and team of teachers who allow so many of our young people to discover their musical gifts and to shine. Mr Gillthorpe assures me that there is still room for improvement!

**New Appointment:** I am delighted to announce that we have appointed a new chaplain to take over from Sam when he moves to his curacy in September. We had a strong field from all parts of the country and Revd Adrian Wolton has accepted the post. Adrian is currently a curate at St Paul's Church of England Church in Weston-super-Mare where his focus area was Students and Discipleship. Adrian will be moving up here in the summer with his wife, Fran, and their three children. He is at present, in addition to his roles in the church, the Chaplain to the lifeboat crew and I understand he is eager to make similar links up here.



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**School Funding:** funding is going to become a very significant issue for us and many other schools in Lancashire, in the next few years, following the publication of figures showing how the Government's proposed National Funding Formula will apply to schools.

If implemented, the National Funding Formula (NFF) will reduce Ripley's funding by 2.9% over 2 years from September 2018. Ripley has historically always been poorly funded, being in the bottom 25% of Lancashire schools.

Reductions in funding, due to cost increases and decreased funding streams, have been £1.16 million over four years, around 14% of our total budget. We have managed, unlike many schools, to set a balanced budget for next year and were counting on the new formula to ensure that money would be distributed more evenly away from the large cities to all schools. However, that does not seem to be the case and I am astounded that we are to lose another 2.9% of the 11-16 school budget (£181,000).

Additionally we will have to fund a further increase in the employers' contribution to the Local Government Pension Scheme in 2017-2018, continuing increases in our payments towards the deficit in that scheme and the new Apprenticeship levy. It is likely that a further unfunded 1% cost of living pay rise will be recommended for 2017-2018, putting further strain on our budget. It is difficult to see how we, and other local schools, can continue to offer the same standard of education in a climate of such drastic funding reductions.

The National Funding Formula was originally drawn up to make funding fairer, because of such wide discrepancies between the lower funded shire counties and the urban centres. However, the rhetoric has more recently changed back to funding according to need and the monies have largely returned to the urban areas. It would seem that they have greater power and influence! I have written to our three local MPs to make our views known and we will be replying to the consultation document.

**South Africa:** Following a very successful trip to South Africa under the auspices of the Diocese in 2016, the Bishop has agreed to a further trip in 2018. On the last occasion Ripley students made up the majority of the members of the group. I am pleased to say that Sam and Miss Robinson will again be organising the event and we already have over 20 young people signed up to go. This is a wonderful opportunity for them to get involved in social justice in very practical ways, working in an orphanage and undertaking some building work.

**Ripley+ "Serve. Lead. Inspire."** On Friday 10 February, we were proud to present 50 pupils in Year 11 with their Ripley+ medals. This was in recognition of the leadership and service they have demonstrated throughout their key stage 4 journey at Ripley. We were very impressed with the wide range of activities pupils were involved in and the skills they say they developed as a result. Congratulations go to all our award winners and especially to Adam Hilton and Lucy Tidswell who were awarded the prestigious Principal's gold medal for outstanding service to the academy.

**The Ripley Farm:** The lambing season is upon us again and our family on the farm has significantly increased with the birth of 40+ new lambs. Our young people love this time of year and there is a continual trail of visitors (staff and pupils!) to inspect the new arrivals.

I look forward to a hard-working March with intensive preparation for the examination season ahead and the challenge of the new GCSE papers!

*E Nicholls*