



11th November 2024

Dear Parent/Carer

We have had an excellent start to the year, with an overwhelming response to our Open Events, Pastoral Welcome Evenings, Year 11 and Sixth Form Parent/Carer Evenings, and other activities this term.

This letter addresses a different yet significant matter, one that I must admit was challenging to write. However, I hope that once you have read it, you will understand my reasons for sharing it, even if it may not directly apply to you.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the ongoing support from the families in our community, who place their trust in us and show their appreciation. The positive outcomes and substantial achievements we have seen at St. Augustine's, including our very successful OFSTED and SIAMS inspection, would not have been possible without your faith and commitment. I am incredibly grateful for the support our parents and carers have shown, and I hope you will keep this in mind as you read the remainder of this letter.

I am confident that this year will bring us continued success, particularly by ensuring that our committed staff choose to remain at St. Augustine's rather than seek opportunities elsewhere or leave the profession entirely.

Regrettably, given the circumstances I will detail below, I believe we have reached a point where, as a community, we must be mindful of the wellbeing of our hardworking and dedicated staff. I kindly ask for your collective support in helping us to support them effectively.

Many of us acknowledge that we live in a society where placing blame on others has become common. It is all too easy to express complaints or negative comments through email, in person or on the phone, often without considering the workload, offence, or emotional impact that such remarks can have on staff. Equally just because our staff work in public service does not mean they should accept the questioning of their judgment or professionalism, criticism or abuse.

With considerable experience across various types of schools in London, I can confirm that the current situation is more challenging than ever, and this is not unique to us; it is affecting schools nationwide. While this letter pertains to a very small number of parents and carers, the impact of persistent emails, complaints, phone calls, and verbal abuse is significant. Although my staff are resilient, **they are human.**

I have listed below just some examples to illustrate my point. This is not exhaustive:

- Our front-line staff on reception have been the subject of intimidation or verbally abused by parents, and our pastoral leaders and their teams are sometimes uncomfortable and concerned about talking to certain parents because of their combative attitude, hostility, impoliteness, or unreasonable behaviour.

- We are finding that when we implement reasonable and proportionate trauma informed consequences for poor behaviour, a small number of parents and carers of the child affected will persistently write or call to voice their complaints. They acknowledge our high standards and the necessity of consequences, but often struggle to accept this when it involves their own child. In some isolated cases parent/carers actively encourage and support their child to refuse to accept or attend detentions of any kind.
- Every day, members of my senior leadership team and pastoral team spend a significant proportion of their time dealing with persistent emails and phone calls from a small number of parent/carers whose communications involve unreasonable challenges to fair and proportionate decisions, complaining, or trying to dictate our school's ethos and values, policies or expertise. We then regularly spend time reassuring or explaining issues to parents who are receiving information from their child that is often inaccurate and simply untrue.
- Staff are expected to remain professional and calm when communicating on the phone or in person with parents and carers. However, a small number of parents and carers believe that this same standard does not apply to them. Staff are regularly interrupted, talked over, derided, accused of dishonesty, and, in rare cases, subjected to veiled threats. These instances arise simply because of staff carrying out their roles and attempting to provide factual information to parents and carers.

The overwhelming majority of our parents and carers are supportive and may well be shocked to read this. I genuinely believe that each of you has the best interests of your child at heart. Our school is extremely outward facing; we communicate regularly with families, make use of social media, provide frequent news and updates, and openly celebrate the achievements of our amazing students and staff. We hold Pastoral Welcome Evenings, Parent/Carer Evenings, Literacy Events, Proms, Coffee Mornings, Options Evenings, and a whole array of different events where the school consistently communicates our pride and commitment to working with our students and their families. This approach is welcomed by the vast majority of our parents and carers, and we truly appreciate the positive feedback we receive at these events.

This letter is not intended to stifle legitimate concerns. It aims to address unreasonable, rude, or aggressive communication, as well as excessive communication. We have over 1,000 students on roll, and most concerns, questions, or queries from parents and carers are resolved calmly and constructively. I value all the parents/carers I have already met this term who have provided valuable feedback in a collaborative and supportive way.

We are a very popular school; we live our ethos and values every day, and we are one of the most inclusive and child-centred schools in the country. This has only been possible because of our staff and the support of most parents and carers. As you can understand, I am disappointed that the negative behaviours outlined in this letter have continued despite this positive context. These actions are becoming exhausting, upsetting, and unacceptable, and they increasingly detract from the positive work our staff do for your children.

I know that most of you will find the following points obvious, but please rest assured that this message is likely not to be directed at you. I write all of this with careful consideration of what is ultimately best for our students.

- Abuse against our staff will not be tolerated. We will not respond to abusive emails, and we will end abusive conversations.
- Accept that our high standards and, on occasions consequences, help children learn.
- Support us in upholding these high expectations for behaviour, even for your own child.
- We are an organisation which deals with people and therefore not every issue is straightforward. Our decisions are never taken lightly, and you will not always agree with them. Sometimes though, what your children may tell you may be wrong, or you may not have the complete picture. Please do not jump to conclusions and wait for us to provide you with the full picture.
- We will be enforcing our visitor's policy, which ultimately bans abusive parents from the school site. (Please find a copy of our visitor's policy attached)

Everyone makes mistakes. When we do, I can assure you they are simply that. Mistakes. There is no malicious intent or hidden agenda. We will apologise when we make them and seek to do better next time. Two of our key values are kindness and love. We all respond well when people are kind and polite to us, and my staff are no exception.

To our supportive parents:

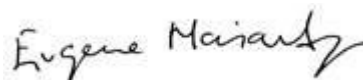
- Thank you to those who share the great experiences and appreciation for what my staff and the school community provide for their child with the wider community.
- Thank you to those who talk to us in a friendly manner and respect and accept the decisions we make, however difficult.
- Thank you to those who are appreciative of the work of our staff. This means a lot to them, and it motivates them to help you and your child(ren).

Thank you for your support, trust, and for taking the time to read this letter. I realise it is lengthy, but I felt it was important to be transparent with our parents/carers. I believe it is essential to protect my staff because, ultimately, this will benefit your children. We have a wonderful, successful school, brilliant children, and, thankfully, a great many supportive parents and carers.

Yours faithfully



Ms Rachel Kelly
Head of High School



Eugene Moriarty
Head of Federation