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15 September 2009

Dear Parent/Carer

I would like to begin by welcoming back everyone to the start of what promises to be an extremely busy term and indeed year. We are particularly pleased to welcome all our Year 7 students who look extremely smart in their new uniform.

It has of course been an exceptionally busy summer period and one which has seen some significant changes which I would like to bring you up to speed with in this letter. In the nine month period since the inspection visit we have introduced changes to the school day; the supervision arrangements for students; our curriculum; our uniform and our staffing structure. All of the above has been achieved in a summer break which has been considerably disrupted due to alterations to the fabric of our buildings.

I would like to assure you that all of the changes we have introduced are designed to ensure that each and every one of our students achieves their full potential. However, I must apologise if the speed at which these have been implemented have caused any inconvenience or indeed concern. Implementing so many changes at once is not something a school would normally seek to do but the timing has been determined by our need to secure rapid improvement in order to address concerns raised by Ofsted.

### **Building improvements**

The building work which has gone on has been necessary to secure improvements to the safety of the students and staff in the eventuality of a fire and ensure the school is fully compliant with current health and safety regulations. In addition we have replaced the existing dilapidated Sixth Form building with new accommodation which provides our Sixth Form students with a new common room, improved private study facilities and a specialist classroom that are fit for purpose. This work has been completed at considerable expense and we are extremely grateful to West Berkshire Council for supporting us financially in securing these improvements.

However, the building works which should have been completed by the 28 August overran and this has regrettably caused a certain amount of disruption to the start of our term for which I can only apologise. This delay resulted in our being unable to access school and consequently our computer network and management systems over the entire summer period. In addition some classrooms were not ready to be used at the start of term which caused considerable disruption to the planned rooming of classes. This situation has unfortunately had an impact on our capacity to complete some normally routine administrative tasks which feed into the process of organising students into groups. Regrettably we were forced to provisionally group Year 7 students and then further refine their classes once we had all the data on students in place. You will appreciate that this was not a decision which was taken lightly but it is one that is necessary to ensure that each student is correctly placed in the teaching group most appropriate to their ability.

We will of course be issuing new passports to all those students affected. We had intended to do so at the end of the first full timetable cycle in two weeks time when any necessary revisions to student timetables and rooming have been made.

Further improvements to the fabric of our buildings will be undertaken throughout the course of the school year. These will include the refurbishment of toilets, the decoration of classrooms and corridors and the construction of new canopies to provide shelter at break times.

## **Exam results**

We are very pleased to inform you of the good progress which has been made in terms of exam results by our students in all three key stages. As you are all aware one of the main reasons the school was placed in special measures by Ofsted was a direct result of concerns over the rates of progress some students were making across the school. In particular our GCSE results had declined significantly over the last three years. I am very proud to inform you that Year 11 managed to halt this trend by showing a significant improvement across nearly all standard benchmarks. The number of students achieving five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE increased by 10% which was in part due to significant improvements in the number of students achieving C grades in both English and mathematics .

The improvement in our results at KS5 was even better with our A-C pass rate at A2 improving by 10%. At the same time our value added scores at both AS and A2 have improved. In the case of the AS results of our current Year 13 students the value added score improved from 7 to 4. Value added scores are judged on a scale of one to nine with one being the highest and nine being the lowest. A value added score of 4 is categorised as 'very good' and represents the schools best ever achievement at AS.

## **New staff**

The start of the academic year has seen several new colleagues join the school and a number of our existing staff moving to different posts within our new staffing structure. The following new members of staff have joined us:

Ms S Kendall	Curriculum Leader English
Mrs M West	Director of Personal Development
Mrs L Bewick	Subject leader – RS
Mr E Anders	English teacher
Miss K Ellis	Music teacher
Mr A Farquharson	Science teacher
Mr B Glaze	History teacher (maternity cover for Mrs Griffiths)
Miss K Greenacre	PE teacher
Miss C Holt	Science teacher
Mr A Hussain	Science teacher
Miss K McGrandle	Geography teacher (maternity cover for Mrs Holley)
Mr P Mortimer	Science teacher
Ms K Paskauskiene	Psychology teacher
Mr A Sarkar	Maths tutor
Miss K Sims	English teacher
Mr A Wright	Music teacher

Under the new staffing structure we have created a number of new roles which are designed to improve standards of learning and teaching and the quality of the academic guidance we give to our students. A key element of the changes we have introduced is the creation of a new guidance team. The team consists of both Student Managers and Guidance Managers (one for each year group) who are responsible for the academic progress of students.

The Guidance Managers are:

Miss E Jeffrey	Year 7
Miss D Radu	Year 8
Mrs J Ostridge	Year 9 (maternity cover for Mrs Holley)
Miss R Mason	Year 10
Mrs L Maclean	Year 11

The Guidance Managers will be supported by a team of three Student Managers who are non teaching members of staff making them more readily available to both students and parents when most staff are teaching. In many cases the Student Manager attached to the relevant year group will be the person you are most likely to be initially referred to if you have a query. The Student Managers are:

Miss K Seymour	Years 7 and 8
Mrs A Harris	Years 9 and 10
Mrs A Sawyer	Year 11

The guidance team are jointly led by Miss Kemp in her new role as Director of Academic Guidance and Mrs West, who is new to the school in her role as Director of Personal Development.

### **Curriculum changes**

Those of you who are parents of older students will of course have been used to students in Year 7 at Denefield being taught in tutor groups which meant they were consistently with the same set of students for all subjects. This approach formed an essential component of the 'Opening Minds' curriculum. However, such an approach to grouping students is not always compatible with ensuring that every student realises their full potential. Indeed you will have seen from what Ofsted said in the 2008 report that "improving rates of progress" is something they felt we needed to achieve. In all the presentations I have made to parents throughout last year I made clear our intention to organise the students by ability sets in most subjects. All students will of course remain part of a tutor group throughout their time at Denefield and will spend 30 minutes of each day with their fellow tutees for what will become an increasingly important element of their educational provision.

Changes to 'Opening Minds' curriculum have also been driven as a result of the revised National Curriculum which introduces the concept of PLTS (Personal Learning and Thinking Skills) which like the Opening Minds curriculum provide a set of cross curricular competencies which are required to be taught and assessed alongside subject specific knowledge, skills and understanding. Further information on changes to the Year 7 curriculum will be provided via our website and we will be holding a Year 7 learning experience evening specifically on this subject on Wednesday 21 October from 6.30 – 8.30pm.

### **Open evening**

Our Open Evening for prospective parents and students takes place on Monday 21 September and I would like to remind you that, to allow preparations for this event to take place, the school will be closed to students at 1.30pm. I apologise for any inconvenience this closure may cause.

### **Attendance and lateness**

As you know at Denefield we regard regular attendance as being essential to ensuring every student learns effectively. You will have already received a copy of the letter I sent home from Margaret Goldie which provides very clear guidance about the circumstances in which I am able to authorise absence. A copy of this letter is on our website. You will see from the contents of the letter that I am unable to authorise holidays in term time except under exceptional circumstances.

I would like to remind you of the importance of notifying us on the first day your son or daughter is absent from school. There are two ways in which you can do this:

- o ring the student absence number on 0118 9728961 and leave a message;
- o send an email to [absence@denefield.org.uk](mailto:absence@denefield.org.uk).

It is very important that we get early notification of absence; we may ring you to check if your son or daughter is absent and if this notification has not been received. On returning to school after an absence, your son or daughter should bring a note from you confirming the length of the absence, and the reason for it, and hand it in at reception.

## **Uniform**

We are extremely pleased with the new uniform and are very proud of the students' smart appearance. Indeed I have received many complimentary remarks from parents, staff and members of the community expressing how smart our students look.

However, we are aware of the difficulties some of you have had in securing items of uniform over the summer period in time for the start of the new term and I would like to apologise for the problems you have experienced. Walking around school we believe that over 85% of students in Years 8 -11 have chosen to wear the new uniform despite this not being a compulsory requirement for anyone other than Year 7. Despite seeking advice we were not anticipating this level of uptake and regrettably our supplier has been unable to cope with the demand. As those of you affected will be aware interim measures have been put in place and we have been assured that all outstanding items of uniform will be available by the end of October.

As you will recall from the information sent to you as part of the uniform consultation process it has never been our intention to act as sole supplier of the new Denefield uniform. In future you will be able to obtain our uniform through Meadway Outfitters.

## **Transport to school**

Several of you have contacted the school and our governors to express concerns over the recent changes to the bus timetable which has resulted in a number of students having problems with transport to and from school.

The facts are as follows. Reading Buses have taken a unilateral decision to alter a number of services which our students routinely used to travel to and from school. At the same time they have taken the decision to send two single decker buses instead of the two double decker buses normally provided to collect students directly from school. The first we knew of these changes was on the day it happened. Since then we have been in direct contact with Reading Buses, and both West Berkshire and Reading transport services. We very much hope to resolve this matter this week and would ask all parents affected to express their concerns directly to Reading Buses, and the transport departments at both West Berkshire and Reading. We will of course keep you informed via our website as and when we are made aware of any progress on this matter.

You will also be aware that the speed humps have been removed along the entire length of Long Lane and have been replaced with a series of new traffic calming measures. Whilst these measures have no doubt been put in place to protect the public, they have had some impact on the congestion which occurs at the end of the school day. I would remind all parents who drive to school of the need to consider carefully where they park when dropping off and picking up students. Consideration for others will help to avoid compromising the safety of our students and causing any unnecessary disruption to the normal flow of traffic.

## **Changes to rewards and sanctions**

There have been a number of changes to the behaviour system at Denefield. In consultation with staff, parents and students, the rewards and sanctions have been streamlined in order to create a more effective and consistent system that students understand and staff can easily administer.

### **Rewards:**

The students said "Rewards should be special, make you feel good and make you want to repeat that behaviour".

To achieve this objective, students will in future receive postcards from teaching staff for sustained achievement, outstanding work and contributions within the classroom, within the school and within the community. Additionally the names of students who have performed well and have made excellent progress will appear on praise boards around the school and may be nominated for student of the month/term. The Key Stage Awards ceremonies and the Headteacher's Awards will continue to be organised.

### **Sanctions:**

The students said "Sanctions should be serious, make you feel bad and not want to repeat the behaviour".

To achieve this objective, students will in future be allowed one opportunity to rectify any poor behaviour and will be encouraged by staff to "put it right". If poor behaviour continues, students will be spoken to and if necessary removed from the class to call out rooms for the remainder of the lesson. Parents will then receive a call to talk through the issues that need to be resolved and may be invited to a meeting to discuss a way forward for their child. All students have been made aware that the purpose of this approach is to minimise disruption to learning which will not be tolerated.

Student behaviour will in future be recorded on our SIMS information system; one point for each behavioural incident recorded. When students have reached eight behaviour points they will be required to serve a one hour detention. Parents will be informed by letter of the date on which the detention must be served.

Types of behaviour are weighted and more serious misconduct will result in the allocation of a higher number of points. Such incidents will also be referred through curriculum areas or the guidance team to the senior management team. In the most extreme cases of poor behaviour the Headteacher will consider whether the use of internal or external exclusion would be appropriate.

Finally, we have introduced a number of reintegration strategies to support students returning from exclusion or who require help to modify their behaviour. Individuals who may benefit from such support will be referred to the inclusion centre via the guidance team.

I hope the above helps to clarify the changes we have introduced to our rewards and sanctions at Denefield. We hope that you will be able to support us in what we are endeavouring to achieve by making your child aware of the need to make the right choices.

## **Changes to school day**

Following the consultation earlier in the year and as you will know from the letter I sent to parents on 10 July, we have this term implemented some changes to the school day. The standard teaching unit has remained as one hour but sessions in some subjects are being delivered as doubles. A small number of KS5 classes in minority subjects have been scheduled in the twilight session which takes place after school.

In addition, the consultation showed the majority of parents and staff supported a split lunch arrangement: this has been implemented this term and will I believe greatly improve the eating arrangements and supervision of our students at lunchtime. Many of you were also very much in favour of strengthening the role of the tutor and the new lunch arrangements allow us to increase

the amount of time devoted to tutor related activities such as academic monitoring, extended learning and homework supervision.

Lunchtime begins for Key Stage 3 students at 11.50am. They then return to their tutor room for tutor time from 12.30 until 1 pm. Key Stage 4 students have tutor time and lunch at the opposite times from Key Stage 3.

To ensure that the tutor time for each Key Stage is not disrupted by any noise made by the students who are on their lunch break, we have created a new area away from the classrooms. This area is newly fenced in order to ensure the students are supervised much more effectively and consequently reduce any opportunity there may have been in the past for incidents of poor behaviour or bullying to take place.

I am aware that some misinformation has arisen about this arrangement and so I would like to invite any parents who have concerns to come up to school to see for themselves the area in question. Please telephone reception or email [myvoice@denefield.org.uk](mailto:myvoice@denefield.org.uk) to arrange a convenient time.

### **Ofsted update**

I would like to remind you that we are expecting a further monitoring visit from our HMI to take place around November. Following this visit you will receive a further monitoring report which will provide you with information about the progress we are making to secure the necessary improvements.

### **Term dates September 2009 – July 2010**

The term dates for the current academic year are as follows (all holiday dates are inclusive)

<b>Autumn term</b>	Half term Last day of term	Monday 26 October - Friday 30 October Friday 18 December
<b>Spring term</b>	Start of term for students Half term Last day of term	Wednesday 6 January Monday 15 February – Friday 19 February Wednesday 31 March
<b>Summer term</b>	Start of term for students Half term Last day of term	Tuesday 20 April Monday 31 May – Friday 4 June Friday 23 July

**Additional bank holiday outside of school holidays:** Monday 3 May

**Remaining Inset days:** Friday 27 November  
Tuesday 5 January  
Monday 19 April

**Terms dates September 2010 – July 2011** (all holiday dates are inclusive)

<b>Autumn term</b>	Start of term for students	Friday 3 September
	Half term	Monday 25 October - Friday 29 October
	Last day of term	Friday 17 December
<b>Spring term</b>	Start of term for students	Wednesday 5 January
	Half term	Monday 21 February – Friday 25 February
	Last day of term	Friday 8 April
<b>Summer term</b>	Start of term for students	Wednesday 27 April
	Half term	Monday 30 May – Friday 3 June
	Last day of term	Friday 22 July

**Additional bank holiday outside of school holidays:** Monday 2 May

**Inset days:** Wednesday 1 September  
Thursday 2 September  
Monday 1 November  
Tuesday 4 January  
Tuesday 26 April

**Reminder**

I would like to remind you that all communications with parents, including letters and Ofsted monitoring reports are routinely published on our website. In addition from next term Denefield Matters will be published online in full colour, allowing us to include more photos and input from the students. Switching to an online version will save the school nearly £1800 per issue! Denefield Matters, as well as other school communications, can be delivered to your e-mail account. If you would like us to set this up send an e-mail to [myvoice@denefield.org.uk](mailto:myvoice@denefield.org.uk) with Denefield Matters as the subject, please include your name and the name of your child/children.

Finally, in common with many schools both locally and nationally, Denefield operates a Trust to raise funds for the school. The Denefield School Trust gives all families the opportunity to support our fund raising activities. We do appreciate that this will not be possible for all families but would ask everyone to give consideration to helping Denefield in this way. All the money raised through the Trust will be used for the benefit of education at Denefield School. The Trust has no employees and administration of the Trust is undertaken on a voluntary basis.

Families are encouraged to donate whatever amount they feel able to contribute. This would be used to provide projects and equipment for the benefit of the students at Denefield School which could not otherwise be funded out of the normal school budget.

Clearly there is no way that the governors can impose a compulsory charge but they hope that all parents will see the benefit that all students will gain through the scheme. Consequently they hope that all parents will feel able to support the school fund. You can make your payment even more beneficial to the school by completing the attached pro-forma. If you are able to state that this payment has been made from taxed-income we are able to reclaim all the tax you have paid. Therefore a £25 donation by you will be worth £31.25 to the school. If it is more convenient, you can make payment by standing order, rather than by cheque.

I should be most grateful if you return the attached pro-forma to the school's finance office by Friday 23 October.

I look forward to meeting many of you in the near future.

Yours sincerely

Glyn Whiteford  
Headteacher

# GIFT AID DECLARATION

**Name of charity**            Denefield School Development Trust Company Limited

**Details of donor**

Title \_\_\_\_\_ Forename(s) \_\_\_\_\_ Surname \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

I want this charity to treat all donations I have made since 6 April 2009 and all donations I make from the date of the declaration until I notify you otherwise as Gift Aid donations.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Notes**

You must pay an amount of income tax and/or capital gains tax at least equal to the tax that the charity reclaims on your donations in the tax year (currently 20p for each 80p you give which is equivalent to 25p for each £1 you give).

You may cancel this declaration at any time by notifying the charity. You may cancel your standing order at any time by giving instructions direct to your bank.

If in the future your circumstances change and you no longer pay tax you should cancel your declaration.

If you pay tax at a higher rate you can claim further tax relief in your Self-Assessment tax return.

Please notify the charity if you change your address.

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## STANDING ORDER AUTHORITY

To: (bank) \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postcode: \_\_\_\_\_

Please pay the sum of £ \_\_\_\_\_ (in words: \_\_\_\_\_)

Now and on the 1 September annually until further notice to Denefield School Development Trust Limited.

Account number 15870766 at NatWest Reading Market Place Branch. Sort Code 60-17-21

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Account Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_