FOXFORD

9 September 2026

Dear Parent / Carer

Re: Year 9 and important decisions

Students can sometimes mistakenly see Year 9 as a year in which they coast away from the settling-in of Year 7 and 8 and slip slowly towards the exam pressure of Years 10 and 11. However, it is a crucially important year and contains some very difficult and paramount decisions; it genuinely matters, and I wanted to write to you at the start of the year to provide further information to support and guide your child.

Year 9 is often described as a *bridge year*, and the evidence corroborates this. The Department for Education's most recent research on attendance and attainment shows a clear and consistent link between how well a pupil attends and performs earlier in secondary school and their eventual outcomes at the end of Year 11. Attendance research more broadly suggests that a drop of just 10% in attendance across the school year can translate into the loss of a whole grade at GCSE. The habits, attitudes and attendance pattern your child builds this year will shape the way they approach their GCSE years.

One of the most important decisions in Year 9 will be choosing GCSE options, so I wanted to share with you some early information on this.

GCSE options for next year will be confirmed later this term and full details will be shared with you as soon as they are finalised. In previous years our options have included subjects such as History, Geography, Spanish, Computer Science, Art, Sociology, Hospitality and Catering, Child Development and Sport to name but a few, alongside the mandatory core curriculum. Please do encourage your child to keep an open mind and to base their eventual choices on genuine interest and strength rather than simply following the decisions of friends.

With that in mind, this year we're asking students to start doing two things in preparation for their GCSE journey.

The first is to begin thinking about what they enjoy, what they are good at, and what kind of future they might want to work towards. This doesn't need to be a firm decision, most students genuinely don't know yet and that's completely normal, but Year 9 is the right time to start those conversations at home, and to make use of the support we have in school. Mrs Smith, our careers advisor, is on hand throughout the year to talk to students individually about their interests, strengths and possible pathways, and I'd encourage every student to make use of her expertise as the year goes on. She can be found in the lower 3 storey, and students can make careers appointment directly with her.

The second is to focus on building the independence and learning habits that Year 10 and the GCSE process will demand: being punctual to lessons, behaving consistently well, being proactive rather than passive in their learning, asking questions, completing home learning and independent work and research, as well as taking ownership of their own progress. These habits are far easier to build now, than to try to develop them under exam pressure in Year 10 or 11.

There are many ways that you can support as a parent/carer, please do take a look at the attached flyer which includes websites to support revision, and also to support you as a parent of a student approaching their GCSE years.

Thank you, as ever, for your support at home. If you have any questions about Year 9, options, or how you can support your child's attendance and learning habits this year, please don't hesitate to get in touch via the Foxford enquiries email address.

Yours faithfully



Leanne Rowe
Assistant Headteacher and SLT link for Year 9