



Newsletter 5



Aylesbury High School

February 2017

The to-do list...

by Mr Rosen, Headteacher

As well as all of the regular tasks involved in keeping the ship going in the right direction and afloat and crewed and so on, we have a number of emerging issues/challenges/opportunities that will take shape over the next few months.

1. The details of the National Funding Formula are out for consultation and we will be formulating a response in the next few weeks. See page 5 for further details.
2. The government has pulled back, for the moment, from insisting that all schools become academies, and having to join others in a Multi-Academy Trust. However, we need to keep this under review as the pressure may return, and the changes ahead for the local authority and school improvement services may soon make MATs more attractive. See page 7 for more on this.
3. We are reviewing our ICT strategy over the next few weeks and months, as not only is the technology evolving quickly, but so is how teaching and learning can exploit the technology. How much of our lives should be cloud-based, which of Apple's, Google's and Microsoft's (or anyone else's) products best meet our needs, what is the future for desktops, laptops and tablets? What should a classroom look like in 2020? We will be consulting widely on this and hope to have some answers during the summer term.

As always, changes such as those above can either be viewed with trepidation or enthusiasm. We are very optimistic that we can navigate the slightly uncertain waters ahead to the benefit of the school, and avoid any rocks or icebergs that might be in the way. And avoid any more seafaring metaphors!

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SIP update

by Miss Brigden, Assistant Headteacher

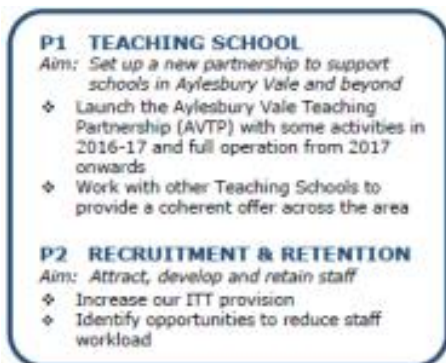


In the December Newsletter we shared the progress on the Teaching and Learning aspects of the 2016/17 School Improvement Plan. This month we are providing an update on Personnel.

Personnel (P)

P1 Teaching School

A development plan for the Aylesbury Vale Teaching Partnership (AVTP) has been created to shape how the partnership can work with other schools in the Aylesbury Vale area. The aim is to provide effective professional development opportunities for staff, robust teacher training and recruitment, and targeted support for schools. Currently through the Newly Qualified Teacher, Developing Teaching and Middle Leader programmes that AVTP is running this year, we are working with a range of schools including AGS, The Grange, Waddesdon School, John Colet, Cottesloe, Dr Challoner's Grammar and Aylesbury Vale Academy. These professional development programmes have supported nearly 50 staff from across these schools. AVTP is also working closely with the other Teaching Schools in Buckinghamshire under the guise of 'Teaching Talent' to ensure that the quality and strength of school to school support across the county remains at a high standard. Buckinghamshire County Council has commissioned the ASPIRE Teaching School to deliver a Behaviour and SEND training programme this year, and the AVTP will be carrying out a Quality Assurance role in this.



P2 Recruitment and Retention

In order to promote the high quality Initial Teacher Training (ITT) that AHS can offer, we have hosted open events for potential trainees in the Autumn and Spring Terms with adverts for these events going out in local newspapers, bus stops and even on banners outside the school. The school has also continued to support the government-run School Experience Programme initiative to invite potential trainee teachers into school to observe lessons. There are exciting times ahead with new pilot programmes such as teacher training apprenticeships that the school will look to getting involved in. The school is also keeping in touch with the Ahlumnae by advertising training and teaching opportunities via their newsletter and Linked In group. The 2017 school survey which will go out to students, parents and staff in April will be a useful opportunity for the school to identify what we are doing well and what we need to further improve.

Governor update

What does the Personnel Committee do?

by Dr Weir, Chair of Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee meets each half term and its main function is to keep under review all of the policies that relate to the safe recruitment and retention of staff working at the school. It is also briefed by Mr Rosen at each meeting about any staff vacancies that may be arising and the plans in place to fill the positions.

Kate Weir,
Chair of
Personnel,
is third from
the left.



This year the committee has also been providing support to Miss Brigden in her role in the establishment and operation of the Aylesbury Vale Teaching Partnership. Amongst others, the aims of the partnership are to attract high calibre people into teaching, to help them to succeed and to provide support between schools. The committee is also supporting the work of the leadership team in its aim to increase ITT provision and in finding ways to develop and award staff, ultimately to benefit the whole school community.

Prevent

by Mrs Hamnett, Deputy Headteacher

What is the Prevent strategy?

Prevent is a government strategy designed to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorist or extremist causes.

The Prevent strategy covers all types of terrorism and extremism, including political and religious extremism.

How does the Prevent strategy apply to schools?

From July 2015 all schools (as well as other organisations) have a duty to safeguard young people from radicalisation and extremism.

This means schools have a responsibility to protect young people from extremist and violent views, in the same way we protect them from drugs or gang violence.

Importantly, schools can provide a safe place for students to discuss these issues so that they better understand how to protect themselves.

What does this mean in practice?

Different schools will carry out the Prevent duty in different ways, depending on the age of their students and the needs of the community.

Many of the things we already do in school to help our students become positive, happy members of society also contribute to the Prevent strategy.

Here are some examples:

- *Exploring other cultures and religions and promoting diversity*
- *Challenging prejudices and racist comments*

- *Developing critical thinking skills and a strong, positive self-identity*
- *Promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils, as well as British values such as democracy*
- *Protecting young people from the risk of radicalisation, such as using filters on the internet or vetting visitors who come into school*

Frequently Asked Questions

How does Prevent relate to British values?

Schools have been required to promote British values since 2014, and this will continue to be part of the response to the Prevent strategy.

British values include:

- Democracy
- The rule of law
- Individual liberty and mutual respect
- Tolerance of different faiths and beliefs

Isn't my daughter too young to learn about extremism?

The Prevent strategy is not just about discussing extremism itself, which may not be appropriate for younger children. It is also about teaching young people values such as tolerance and mutual respect.

Aylesbury High School will make sure any discussions are suitable for the age and maturity of the students involved.

Is extremism really a risk in our area?

Yes. Extremism can take many forms, including political, religious and ideological extremism. Some of these may be a bigger threat in our area than others but this part

of the UK has had its fair share of difficulties.

The intention is to give young people the skills to protect them from any extremist views they may encounter, now or later in their lives.

KEY TERMS

Extremism – vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values such as democracy, the rule of law and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs

Ideology – a set of beliefs

Terrorism – an action that endangers or causes serious violence to a person/people, causes serious damage to property, or seriously interferes or disrupts an electronic system, and is intended to advance a political, religious or ideological cause

Radicalisation – the process by which a person comes to support extremism and terrorism

External sources

The following sources may be useful for further information:

[Revised prevent duty guidance for England and Wales, HM Government](#)

[What is Prevent? Let's Talk About It](#)

AHS House

by Mrs Jarrett, House Coordinator

You will probably by now be familiar with our many house events, and the general excitement that comes with the end of year awarding of the House Cup and consolation Wooden Spoon.

The start of a new calendar year brings with it the prospect of a busy two terms for all houses with auditions and rehearsals underway for house music, dance, drama and languages, and with points building up for house technology, sports and art. This seems a good moment therefore to explain a little about how the system works and just how those final points are calculated.

We have six houses at AHS: Ascott, Claydon, Hughenden, Missenden, Stowe and Waddesdon, which you may have spotted represent some of our local grand houses. Students are allocated a house by nature of their form in Year 7, and new members of our Sixth Form are also assigned a house upon arrival.

As vividly seen during House Athletics, each house has its own colour: blue (Ascott), yellow (Claydon), purple (Hughenden), green (Missenden), red (Stowe) and orange (Waddesdon).



Each house has a captain and two deputies, appointed by voting which takes place in the April each year when the candidates are in Year 12. The house competitions are run by Year 12 students and each house is awarded points according to the position that they come. The totals are totted up at the end of the year and the house with the most points wins the much desired House Cup. As part of the AHS tradition, the house with the least points takes the dubious honour of the wooden spoon which is then proudly displayed for a year alongside the House Cup.

As House Coordinator, I am always so impressed with the strong sense of house spirit at AHS and it is a delight to see the students throw themselves into the different events. All students are strongly encouraged to find an activity that they would like to support and with the wide variety on offer, there really is something for everyone.

Higher Education Evening

by Mrs Sutton, Transitions Coordinator

Higher Education Evening – Tuesday 14 March 2017

Each year the school holds a Higher Education Evening for Year 12 students starting to consider their post-18 education and training options. This year's event will be held on Tuesday 14 March at 6.30pm.

All Year 12 students are invited to attend with their parents/carers. The evening is made up of two parts. The first is an information fair where representatives of universities, employers and organisations will be available to answer questions and distribute information. The second part of the evening is an introduction to the Higher Education application process at Aylesbury High School, with speakers both from the school and a university admissions officer. The event is designed to give students and parents/carers an early opportunity to find out about the many options available after leaving school.

More information will be sent out to Year 12 students and parents/carers; in the meantime, do email me at msutton@ahs.bucks.sch.uk, if you have any questions.

National Funding Formula

by Mr Rosen, Headteacher

We have campaigned for some years now to change the way that schools are funded as the current system is unclear, unfair and illogical. The government finally agreed to review the system, with implementation in 2017-18, but Brexit has delayed that for a year, so any new funding formula would apply, for us, from September 2018 at the earliest. This only applies to our 11-16 funding (Sixth Form funding is separate and has seen a steep reduction in the past five years).

We have made no secret of the fact that, in the past three years, we have been either the lowest-funded secondary school in the country or in the lowest dozen or so (out of about 3000 secondary schools). That, in itself, is not an issue – some school has to be bottom and the nature of our selective intake is such that we will never attract the additional funds that many schools rightly receive. What has been more unfair is that if we somehow moved the school to another local authority, we would instantly receive hundreds of thousands of pounds extra, with the same students.

The government's proposals essentially involve re-distributing the present amount of money, rather than finding additional funds to allow a 'levelling-up' for the relatively under-funded schools. Given the state of the economy, and the pressures from all other areas of the budget (e.g. health, welfare, infrastructure etc.) it is perhaps understandable that they are choosing not to make the deficit worse. We, of course, would argue that investing in education pays for itself several times over, but there is not a great deal of evidence to show that more money directly leads to better results (if there was, our results would be awful!). We also argue that we need more money just to 'keep the lights on'.

We control our budget very tightly, and will continue to do so, to make sure that we don't go into deficit as that becomes a vicious circle and extremely difficult to recover from. Over the past few years, we have had to cope with very limited funding while having to take on a number of additional costs that previously were paid by either the government or the local authority. As an academy, we also received some 'Educational Services Grant' funding to carry out the duties that would otherwise have been carried out by the local authority. Now the government is slashing both our ESG funding and every local authority's equivalent, while maintaining that school spending is protected (it definitely isn't!).

Ahead of us, we have further demands on our budget, the most obvious of which is inflation; our budget has not had any inflation protection for a long time now so any salary increases (e.g. the public sector figure of 1% per year) has to be completely funded by efficiency savings, as do increases in services that we purchase, such as gas and electricity, or equipment and resources. The most widely quoted figure for the squeeze on school budgets ahead is -8% by 2020 (the likely end of this Parliament).

So that is the background to the much-awaited National Funding Formula (NFF). The [proposals](#) have been published and are now out for consultation until 22 March. As well as the consultation document there is a spreadsheet showing the impact on every school in the country if the proposals were accepted in their present form. For AHS, the headlines are that our budget would increase by 4.2% over the next two years. Bucks, overall, is the 21st highest gainer out of 152 local authorities. That is obviously welcome news in a sense, but the detailed proposals have a number of very undesirable and, to us, unacceptable aspects.

GOOD BITS

- The government has finally grasped the nettle of school funding.
- The money allocated to schools is likely to be ring-fenced so that it isn't diverted to other (worthy) educational causes by hard-pressed local authorities.
- A NFF eliminates the current ridiculous system of 152 local authorities spending hours and hours every year making decisions on what to fund, and at what level, without any evidence to base those decisions on.

- There is a mechanism for funding growth in school places (at present the system can't cope with new school places being created in any organised manner, and the secondary school population is predicted to rise considerably in the next 10 years).

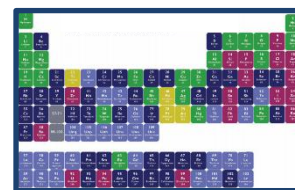
BAD BITS

- There is a (completely flawed) proposal that no school should lose more than 3% with the NFF. In other words, the schools (5,512 of them) who should receive reductions of more than 3% will never reach their NFF level. There is a well-established methodology for schools to cope with budget reductions, which means that they wouldn't lose more than 1.5% per year, but if a school is (say) 15% 'over-funded' then instead of reaching its 'proper' funding in around 10 years, it will only lose 3% in the first two years and then be around 12% over-funded for ever more. That is potentially tying up hundreds of millions of pounds (the DfE have finally admitted that it is £281m) in schools who have enjoyed relatively high funding for many years.
- The proposals are very confused about Pupil Premium funding. We had hoped that PP would, as had been suggested when it was first introduced, become the main way of funding additional needs linked to low family income, but the government has failed to take this opportunity to have a genuine NFF as PP funding will be outside the NFF pot and therefore subject to yet more political influence.
- The amount of funding for Basic Need, to 'keep the lights on', was expected to increase with the NFF. In fact, it has gone down significantly and there doesn't seem much logic as to why that is the case. We would argue for a careful analysis of the amount that a school needs to provide a basic education for every student on roll, and then top that up depending on the additional needs required by each school's students' characteristics. A figure suggested recently for basic need was to have a minimum of £4,800 per secondary student as the starting point; our present funding is just under £4,100 per student! As I explained in assemblies a couple of weeks ago, that translates into around £4 available for every lesson that a student has (more for the Sixth Form as they have fewer taught lessons, hence their smaller class sizes); the suggested minimum would give us nearer £5 per lesson per student. The schools currently receiving higher basic funding are much better placed to have lower pupil-teacher ratios, to resource their subjects more generously and to take care of and develop their facilities (so please see below for our *In Our Element* and also look out for future campaigns!).

Whether the funding glass is half full or half empty remains to be seen, as the feedback from the schools set to lose money has obviously been very loud ("We can't possibly survive with such low funding" even though it would be much higher than we and plenty of others are currently getting). Those who will make modest gains are still conscious of the years of under-funding, and the inflation and other pressures ahead. The politicians may decide that if everyone is moaning then the proposals are about right, but we hope that they read our consultation response carefully!

Ever wanted to turn your 'Cu' into 'Au'?

by Mrs Bennett, Development Director



[The AHS Periodic Table of Elements is now open for business!](#) All elements are available to sponsor and all funds go directly to the refurbishment of S17 – our final science laboratory renovation. This is a fun way to support our fundraising project and have your name (or company!) listed in a permanent teaching tool on display in the science block.

Complete [this form](#) or view the [full table](#) and send it back to the Development Office to sponsor your element.

Elements in our AHS Periodic Table have been priced according to their popular value. You can purchase as many elements as you like, but be aware that the popular elements will sell fast! Current availability (updated weekly) will be shown online.

All sponsored elements will be entered into a prize draw, due to be drawn in the first week of the Summer Term. One lucky entrant will win a 2-night weekend break in [a superb, iconic sea-front apartment in Bexhill-on-Sea](#), East Sussex, generously donated by an AHS parent (terms and conditions apply and can be found [on our web page](#)).

Academies and MATs

by Mr Rosen, Headteacher

Academies were invented by the Labour Government in 2000 and were originally set up to allow sponsors to take over the running of schools that were struggling in terms of their students' achievements and, often, their Ofsted category. One rationale for using sponsors was to side-line the local authority who, for whatever reason, had not managed to turn the struggling school around. By 2010 there were just 200 academies. The Conservative Government then expanded the system to allow (and encourage) successful schools to become Converter Academies, while keeping the Sponsored route. There are now 3,300 academies, of which almost 900 are sponsored.

AHS converted in 2011 and the reality for the students is that it doesn't make any obvious difference to their education – we haven't re-branded, or taken up most of the 'academy freedoms' which are available to us. Behind the scenes, we have taken on significantly more responsibility for running the £6m business and the premises, and that has involved increased financial controls (as we are directly spending government money they require much more detailed accounts than we produced previously), and we buy in services from wherever we think best, almost always at better value and higher quality than before. We still work closely with our local schools and would always want to be part of the local landscape; as an academy it is tempting to build a fence and just look after ourselves, but that doesn't fit with our ethos at all.

Some of the sponsored academies were sponsored by another school, or by an organisation with a number of academies to look after, and are part of a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT). This is on the principle that a successful school or organisation has the capacity and expertise to turn around a less successful school.

At the moment, the evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of MATs is very weak and there have been some high profile cases where MATs have been unable to cope with the number of schools they have taken on.

On the other hand, some MATs are effective and successful.

AHS has no immediate plans to form or join a MAT but we do need to keep a close eye on the landscape as it is evolving so fast. We had expected that the government were going to insist that all schools became academies (as was announced in the White Paper of March 2016) and that they should form into MATs to get economies of scale. At the same time, local authorities would lose the funding that they receive for school improvement (including supporting struggling schools).

The danger of this approach is that schools will form MATs that exclude the most vulnerable schools (a bit like picking sports teams when no-one wants the last few people standing around shivering). Also, in some ways MATs are only as strong as their weakest link, particularly in Ofsted and financial terms – the financial health of a MAT (and therefore every school) is threatened if one member is in deficit; given that all of our budgets are tight, how willing are we to take on the risk of others dragging us down?

Against that is the prospect of having no local authority in place to support schools, particularly primary, and no easy mechanism for getting economies of scale for services and resources. Our expectation is that the next government (after 2020), of whatever colour, will not be content to leave the present set-up as it is, and will either convert every school to become an academy and make them join a MAT, or re-design the system.

In Bucks there are lots of conversations going on about how best to move forward. There are dangers in moving too quickly but just as many dangers in doing nothing. We are taking part in the local discussions about how best to shape the education in our part of Bucks, to make sure we are as informed as we can be – watch this space! It does link with our Teaching School work (see page 2), as the government's intention is that Teaching Schools may take on some of the responsibilities for supporting schools that were previously carried out by local authorities.