



Friday 8th September 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

Headteacher's Weekly Update

It has been a very warm first week! However, overall the students have made a fantastic start. The new Year 7s and 12s look to be fantastic additions to the school.

Tailored Shorts

As a result of the warm weather I took the decision to allow tailored shorts. While I appreciate that it was short notice many students did take advantage of this dispensation (and for those that did I'm sure it made school more comfortable).

In a time when extremes of weather will be more common, I feel that we need a uniform policy that accounts for this. Therefore, we will now permanently adapt our policy to allow students to wear tailored school shorts. I recognise that this change is poorly timed given that we have just had the summer to buy new uniform and I apologise for that. However, the decision was made in response to a freak spell of weather and the trial has shown us that there is merit in allowing shorts.

There were a range of types of shorts this week (understandable, particularly as many younger students may have worn shorts from their primary school uniform). We will expect students to wear **plain black long tailored school shorts**, however, without wishing to encourage you to spend money that you need not, we will continue to accept other dark tailored shorts (e.g. grey, navy blue) for the time being. Such shorts can be purchased from many online and high street retailers (though I appreciate that they are harder to find at this time of the year). While we do not have a single specific type of acceptable short (much like with the school trousers), to avoid confusion, the style of shorts accepted is:



We cannot accept casual shorts. Therefore, please do not send your child to school with sports shorts, tracksuit style shorts or shorts with visible logos.

I would like to thank all of the parents who took the time to send me their views on this trial, it was helpful and appreciated.



Uniform

Thank you for your support and adaptability this week regarding the uniform changes discussed above; the students have looked extremely smart and set an excellent standard despite the high temperatures. The weather is due to return to 'normal' from next week so, in line with announcements made in the welcome assemblies this week, could all students please ensure that they have their blazers from Monday. This is a key aspect of our uniform and we want to ensure we have a consistent approach with this across all year groups to maintain our high standards across the school community.

Mobile Phones

To maximise learning within the classroom, students will be asked at the start of every lesson to place their mobiles and airpods into their bags and away to avoid any distractions. If these items are then seen within the lesson they will be removed and handed into Student Reception where they can be collected at the end of the day. Please support us with this so that classroom environments are positive, purposeful and fully focused on teaching and learning to maximise learning opportunities.

Parent Portal

After a long technical delay I am pleased to share that the Parent Portal will launch on Monday. This app will give you access to live information about your child's conduct in school to help you support your child's learning and behaviour. You will receive further instructions Monday.

Attendance at School

We know that good attendance at school makes a huge difference to your child's achievement. The Government has released updated guidance for schools regarding attendance. They advise that it is usually appropriate for parents and carers to send their children to school with mild respiratory illnesses. This would include general cold symptoms: a minor cough, runny nose or sore throat. However, children should not be sent to school if they have a temperature of 38°C or above. Please refer to [NHS 'Is my child too ill for school?' guidance](#) for further information.

In addition to respiratory illnesses, we are aware that more children may be absent from school due to symptoms of anxiety than before the pandemic. Being in school can often help alleviate the underlying issues. A prolonged period of absence is likely to heighten a child's anxiety about attending in the future, rather than reduce it. If you feel that you need support for your child's mental health and wellbeing please contact Mrs Guinn (sguinn@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk), the Director of School Welfare.

New Food Servery Now Open

After a delayed start, contractors have worked at pace to deliver the new food servery. The renovated room is modern, bright and spacious. I'm sure that the students have noticed the difference! Work continues on the new dining room, which will be ready for use after half-term (which will, hopefully, be perfectly timed for the arrival of less pleasant weather).

Information Evenings

Since the pandemic our parents' evenings have been online and while there are many benefits to this in terms of efficiency and ease, it does reduce the opportunities for parents to visit the school site and meet with staff face to face. As a school we therefore commit to creating at least one opportunity a year for parents to come into school. For parents in the current Years 7 and 13 this opportunity came just before the summer holidays.



This term we have the following evenings for parents to visit the school:

Year Group	Information Evening
8	Thursday 14 th September, 6pm in the main hall
10	Thursday 12 th October, 6pm in the main hall
11	Thursday 12 th October, 7pm in the main hall
12	Thursday 14 th September, 7pm in the main hall

Year 9 parents will be invited into school for the KS4 Options Evening on Thursday 11th January.

Parents' Evenings for 2023/24

As you know, The Emmbrook has seen an incredible rise in popularity over the last few years (with the school population growing just over 700 in 2018 to just under 1,300 students now). This growth has brought with it many benefits (notably more funding and investment in facilities, all for the benefit of our community). However, such growth also brings with it some challenges. I always encourage parents to share feedback directly with me and last year the most common message I received was the frustration at not being able to book parents' evening appointments because teachers were fully booked (due to the larger year groups).

We have looked around to see how other large schools organize their parents' evenings and will be using the model employed by a couple of local schools to increase capacity. This year, parents' evenings for Year 7-11 will begin at 1pm and finish at 6.30pm (Years 12 & 13 will start at 4pm). This will add a huge number of additional slots. Appointments will continue to be online (so it could be possible for parents to join from any location, including work if you are able to arrange a break).

In order to free up the teachers for these appointments, it does mean that school will finish for all students at 12.20pm on the five days that we have a parents' evening. I believe that engagement with parents is an utterly vital element of student success and so the trade off of the early closures is a worthy investment to allow more opportunities for parents to attend appointments with teachers.

So that you can plan ahead, the dates for these early closures (12.20pm) are:

- Thursday 23rd November
- Thursday 7th December
- Thursday 1st February
- Thursday 21st March
- Thursday 13th June

Should you require your child to remain at school on these early closure days then we will have the facility to accommodate this.

Mr Whitehouse will be in touch in due course with a more detailed communication regarding parents' evenings.



Enrolling Your Child for Instrumental and Singing Lessons

The Emmbrook is visited on a weekly basis by many teachers from Berkshire Maestros who provide specialist tuition on a wide range of instruments and for singing (beginners to advanced). Lessons can be requested during the school day or after 4.00 pm (Monday to Thursday) as part of the 'Wokingham Emmbrook Area Music Centre' based here at school.

Letters with more information are available from the Music Department. If you have any additional queries, please contact Mrs Wellman (awellman@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk). The Emmbrook actively encourages its students to be involved in music making, recognising the broader benefits that musical learning and participation bring.

The PTA

We are very fortunate to benefit from the outstanding support of our PTA. The PTA is a charity of parent volunteers that fundraises to provide the extra resources for our students. Volunteers are always welcome (and the commitment can be as small or as large as you would like!). They will be holding their AGM on Monday 18th September at 7.30pm at school. Please email via pta@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk for more information.

Year 6 Tours & Open Evening

We are at that time of year again when we will be welcoming Year 6 students and parents to visit the school as they think about their school choices for September 2024. There will be tours every morning for the next three weeks. This year's Open Evening runs from 6pm on Wednesday 27th September. I hope that we will have the majority of students with us that evening to support the event. As we do every year, school will end at 12.20pm on that day to allow us to set up for the evening.

If you would like more information about September 2024 then please visit our [website](#) or contact Mr Johnson (cjohnson@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk).

For new parents, I will write a letter at the end of each week to keep you informed as much as possible (it is not normally this lengthy!). I hope that you all enjoy the sunshine this weekend and that it is a little cooler here at school next week.

Best wishes,

Nick McSweeney

Headteacher

nmcsweeney@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk