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Dear Parents and Carers

I would like to offer my sincere thanks for your responses to the consultation regarding the proposed changes to the curriculum, school day, and the term dates at Ortu Secondary schools. It is abundantly clear that parents and carers are both invested in, and extremely passionate about, the education and futures of our young people; your comments provided a platform for us to consider how best we can serve the students in our care. I want to reassure you that children's welfare and attainment will be front and centre of every decision the Trust makes.

A total of 274 responses were received from parents and carers. Though it is not possible to respond individually to all concerns and queries raised, including concerns raised which are very specific to individual pupils, I write to provide further information and explanation to the most common concerns and queries raised.

Impact on Year 10 Students

Feedback: Parents raised concerns that there was a lack of clarity surrounding the impact of the proposed changes on current Year 10 students who have already started GCSE courses.

Response: We want to reassure parents, carers and students that current Year 10 and 11 students will continue to be taught their chosen courses until completion of their GCSEs. There is no intention for students in current Years 10 or 11 to change course.

Sixth Form Subject Offer and impact on current Year 11 Students

Feedback: Parents raised concerns about the proposed reduction of the curriculum in the Ortu Sixth Form, especially from current Year 11 applicants wishing to study a course which we propose will not be available from September 2025.

Response: We want the Ortu Sixth Form to be the 'post 16 destination of choice' in the local area. To achieve this we have been highly selective with the subjects offered. We believe the selected subjects will provide students with the best springboard to the most competitive universities, apprenticeships and career pathways. We are currently reviewing which subjects will provide students with this opportunity and will confirm the Sixth Form curriculum in the Spring Term.

Reduction in the number of GCSEs

Feedback: Parents raised concerns that students will not study a competitive number or KS4 courses.

Response: Students will be entered for a competitive number of GCSEs, in line with the best schools in the country. This means that at the end of Year 11 it is intended that all students will achieve 9 GCSEs, or the vocational equivalent. This is an increase from the 8 GCSEs students currently achieve as we believe this provides the correct balance between breadth and depth in the curriculum.

Mainstream Curriculum
Mathematics
GCSE English Language
GCSE English Literature
Double Science (2 GCSEs)
History
Religious Studies
Language
Option Subject

Compulsory History and Religious Studies

Feedback: Parents voiced concerns about the value of students sitting GCSE courses in History and Religious Studies.

Feedback: We believe that students deserve access to a broad and balanced curriculum and the study of both history and religious studies equips young people with knowledge and insight that will stand them in good stead beyond the classroom and beyond the curriculum. The study of these subjects specifically supports a deeper and more informed understanding of other subjects and the world beyond. By adopting a federated approach to key subjects, we can ensure that they are delivered to a world class standard in order to provide students with a deep understanding of humanity and how society has changed over time. The federation is both non-denominational and is committed to inclusion and the study of these subjects promotes that very ethos. The Mossbourne Federation has a proven track record in supporting students to achieve outcomes in line with the best in the country in both history and religious studies and they are respected subjects in which excellent attainment will support future sixth form and college applications. The inclusion of the subjects means that Ortu secondary students are placed in the best position to achieve excellent outcomes and follow a curriculum with both breadth and depth.

The length of periods and the number of periods, in a day

Feedback: Parents were concerned about the shorter 50-minute periods in the timetable.

Response: We want to reassure parents that most lessons will be delivered in double periods. Prep periods and Bourne Scholar lessons will always be single periods. Timetabling double lessons in the majority means learning is optimised because transition between subjects does not erode lesson time. Double lessons also mean that independent practice of taught content can be planned in a meaningful way and independent practice in practical lessons is given appropriate time. It is most likely that students will have a combination of double and single lessons in a day. Where subjects have 3 or more periods in a week the lessons will be split across the week.

Bourne Scholar Programme

Feedback: Parents were unclear about the value or benefit of a non-examined extracurricular course.

Response: We believe that the Bourne Scholar Programme is akin to the teaching of Personal, Social, Health, Citizenship and Economic Education (PSHCE) at secondary school level. The programme seeks to expose students to learning and knowledge not captured within the current national curriculum. It is taught by teachers with a personal interest in, or passion for, the courses and is taught on a carousel rotation. This means that teachers are, or become, expert in the course that they deliver because they deliver the same short course to all students in the respective year group throughout the course of a year. Bourne Scholar Programme has been praised by Ofsted as it makes the curriculum being offered more ambitious than the national curriculum. At KS4 it enables us to keep breadth in the curriculum without the pressure of an additional examination which is in line with our objective of instilling a love of learning for learning's sake.

Prep

Feedback: Parents were unclear about what 'Prep' is and its benefits.

Response: Prep periods are discrete periods in which students undertake personal study but with the support of teaching staff to guide and support them, when needed. Planning periods of independent study into the curriculum aims to instil good habits, teach students how to revise self-reliantly, promote good time management, promote resilience, and support students to 'learn how to learn' so they are equipped with the skills to study beyond the classroom. 'Prep' provides students with an opportunity to complete homework and/or revise and for staff to provide extra, or specialised support, whether that be in small groups or using IT programmes, for example.

Support for SEN Students:

Feedback: Parents were concerned about future support for students with SEN.

Response: It is our aim that every child is taught a path to independence rather than dependence. When considering extra support for our students, we consider what is the minimum level of support needed to ensure equity and allow students to achieve their full potential. Students with SEN will continue to be given the support they are rightfully entitled to. It is important that students with SEN are enabled to achieve to their fullest potential in a mainstream setting and they are supported to become independent learners with the right scaffolds in place to help them to achieve.

Length of School Days

Feedback: Parents raised concern about the extension of the school day Monday to Wednesday and the reduction of the school day on Fridays.

Response: Though we recognise that the proposed school days on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday means a day which finishes later than the current offer, the 15:45 end time for timetabled lessons is approximately in line with local secondary schools and the length of the day is in line with the best performing schools in the country. Historical educational outcomes for Ortu students fall far below acceptable standards and far below what we believe they are capable of achieving. In 2024 students at Ortu secondary schools achieved outcomes which were over half a grade below those achieved at average secondary schools.

We acknowledge that three different finish times may initially appear confusing. The earlier finish time of 14:55 for students on Thursdays will allow for whole academy events, for example parents evenings, and on evenings when there are no whole academy events, teacher training will take place until 17:00. Career Professional Development (CPD) is an intrinsic part of any successful school. By investing in the professional development of staff we will directly impact the quality of provision for the students in our care.

The earlier finish after lunch on Fridays provides an opportunity for staff to run extra-curricular activities should they not wish to do so Monday to Wednesday, provide bespoke support for students who need extra support and/or are underachieving or to plan lessons for the next week. Furthermore, in order to attract and retain the best staff, we must invest in their wellbeing. Offering staff flexibility on Friday afternoons, as well as an excellent training package, will support this.

Extra-curricular Activities

Response: Parents voiced concern that the current co-curricular offer for students would not continue.

Response: Co-curricular clubs will continue in line with the current offer. Finish times will be communicated to parents in advance and we hope that there will be increased opportunity for participation on Friday afternoons.

Shortened October Half Term

Response: Parents raised concerns about the length of the Autumn Term, loss of opportunity to access more affordable holidays and variance in term dates with siblings attending different schools.

Feedback: The shorter October half term will mean that students will have more learning time in the crucial Autumn Term. Should students elect not to take part in co-curricular activities, the earlier finish on Friday afternoons will mean students are more refreshed throughout the term. We have listened to parents and carers who are concerned about the early return from the summer holidays and can confirm that it is extremely rare for students to return to the academy before 1st September. Additionally, the early July finish supports families and staff to access more affordable travel.

In light of responses to the consultation we will review the proposal that the new term dates will be adopted from September 2025 and will share the decision in the Spring Term. Should the new term dates be adopted from September 2025, however, we will make sure that families and staff are not financially penalised by the decision and will support taking of any holidays which were booked prior to Friday, 29th November 2024.

We hope this letter goes some way to providing more guidance to the proposals made in the letter dated Wednesday, 27th November and wish to offer our gratitude, again, to parents and carers who offered views and suggestions. We will write to parents and carers in the Spring Term to confirm the outcome of the consultation and relevant changes at both Gable Hall and Hassenbrook Schools.

Yours sincerely



Mr P Hughes
Interim CEO