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The Vision and Direction for Maidstone Grammar School

1. **MGS is a community.** We are a community sharing a common purpose: to prepare young people for the future. Community is really important to us and this is why we have placed it first. Being part of the MGS community is special. So many people have allegiance to the school. We need to ensure we never lose this. The support we give the students and each other is obvious. Our traditions are really important to us. In fact this word was suggested by the staff and student body as one of the things most important to us. We wish to maintain the ethos of tradition. All that we do at MGS should be based on our core values and it is really important that we constantly return to them.

We intend to strengthen the ethos of celebrating success. We need to be more positive about success and find more opportunities to celebrate and share success. We will return to the grandeur of Celebration Days. We must never lose these special celebrations, and for a school like ours we must ensure they reflect our core values. More opportunities for celebration and reward will be developed, particularly where parents can be fully engaged. Parents have missed this aspect of the school and we are keen to re-establish it. We have already seen the GCSE Presentation event back in early December, but the big one is for the leaving Year 13 students returning to collect their A-Level Certificates. In the past the Old Maidstonian Society has run this event but for various reasons attendance has diminished over the past few years. Work will be done to promote the event as it is an opportunity, not only for students to receive their certificates, but more importantly see each other and the staff that worked with them. The evening will take place in March and be timed to capture students returning from university for Easter and be hopefully followed the next day with a 1st XV vs. Old Boys rugby match. It is events like this that keep the community feel at the school.

2. **MGS is a place for learning.** We strive for academic excellence but most importantly to inspire a lifelong love of learning with students growing as independent leaders.



Obviously a key aim of any school is to raise standards. Our academic performance is excellent, but we also know we can do better. Raising standards does not simply mean working harder. It means working differently, trying new things and giving greater responsibility to the students. Yes, it will mean taking risks, but no one learns anything new by not making mistakes. It also means having higher expectations. What do people do when the bar is raised; they jump higher. The students need to have higher expectations for themselves. They need to believe that they have the ability and can achieve it.

Target setting at Key Stage 4 and 5 is having a positive impact. Standards have improved. This culture of raising the glass ceiling will continue, be strengthened and brought into Key Stage 3. Students having aspirational targets throughout their time at school feel that they are being encouraged to constantly work towards achieving their potential.

Practising skills learnt or the opportunity to write at length are important aspects of learning and these cannot always be accomplished within the curriculum time provided in school. Hence the need for appropriate levels of homework to develop learning. However homework always needs to be directly linked to work being done and be clearly justifiable in academic terms so that the students can see the purpose in doing it. Unnecessary or pointless homework creates resentment amongst students towards school. Excessive homework demands can also create awful tensions at home as you fight to persuade your children to do it. We also need to be careful that if we set students written work to complete, they will reasonably expect feedback on it. Therefore we need to set work appropriately based on how much we can reasonably mark. We need to develop a homework policy in the school based on these principles so that we can extend independence of learning and skill acquisition among students, and prepare them for post 16 education making them self sufficient learners whilst being conscious of their and our work life balance.

A student can go 7 years in this school without parents meeting the teachers who teach them. This cannot be right. However, Academic Interview Day vs. Parents Evening is not the argument. It is important that communication with parents is improved. I am not happy to know that formal opportunities are not given to parents to meet the teachers of their children. We will develop proposals very soon, but Subject Teacher consultation opportunities of some form will be re-introduced in the school from September.

One of the biggest curriculum reforms for 25 years is about to come upon us. English Baccalaureates and A-Level reforms will all need investigation into their impact on what we do here. There will be challenges. But I believe challenges are opportunities. We will continue to provide a broad curriculum for students as we all believe this is the right thing to do. There are still many questions at present and few answers. Please watch this space.

Our enrichment and extracurricular programmes are excellent. Students have a wide variety of opportunities in which to participate, with many also providing leadership and service to the school. This supports them by developing skills and characteristics that are not always developed within the classroom. All of this is possible due to the goodwill of staff and for that I am grateful. Goodwill in a school like this is important. To further develop our enrichment programme we are looking to create an IB CAS type programme for the 6th Form. Completing A-Levels, as we know, is not enough. We want to ensure that all 6th Formers are involved in leadership and/or service. We can learn so much from the student body and they certainly have the skills to take on things with little input from ourselves.

Also within the 6th Form we are looking at our curriculum provision. We have a broad curriculum offer, which is positive for the school, but we cannot be in the situation where we have unviable sets. The dropping culture at AS is something I have always disliked. When students do drop

they can, as a consequence, create unviable sets. This, I'm afraid, cannot continue. Hard and difficult conversations with students and parents may have to be had and difficult decisions about not running small sets may have to be made. This is not desirable, but all schools are now having to look at what they have always been able to offer and ensure there is a balance between funding constraints and student choice.

Learning outside the normal parameters of the classroom is very important to me. Our students are so much more than a set of examination qualifications. They have interests, hobbies, skills and abilities that are as diverse, creative and enriching as those of our staff. We want to find ways to provide opportunities for developing this cultural and social enrichment and so will be introducing an Extended Learning Week in June. This is a week where we will engage as a school in a very different way. All staff and students in Years 7 to 10 will be involved. This is not a week to do History or Geography; this is a week to create a school newspaper, put on a theatrical or musical performance for the local primaries, do a community gardening project at the local old peoples' home, spend the week creating a robot or designing and painting murals for the sports hall. Students will not work in tutor groups; they will work in vertical groups of Years 7-10.

3. **A place to feel safe and supported.** The most important people in the school are our students and the staff body are our principal resource. The work that we all do contributes to the success of the school. This certainly does not go unnoticed and is much valued.

The pastoral and student services aspects of the school are excellent. The structures that are in place are having a positive impact. Going forward, this needs to remain a strength of the school. The House structure though should play a larger part of the school, and not just be seen as a route to compete. With the school being so large, these smaller communities develop identity, belonging and of course competition. The introduction of the House system was a positive one, and so this should be built on. We want to see more competitions, more opportunities for students in one House to work together and so further develop the allegiance to that House. Research suggests that a successful House System forms 'the core unit of identity of the student, so rather than seeing themselves belonging to a school of over 1,300, they attach themselves to a House unit of perhaps only 300 other students, under the watchful eye of the Head of House, and an army of House tutors. Older students have important jobs in looking after the young. Close bonds form between students and with teachers.' We feel that our current pastoral system can help further strengthen the success of the House system.

4. **A community within a community.** Our place in society is really important. There are so many things we already do to engage with the wider community. We need to continue this good practice and forge more links with the community to bring a diverse perspective and dimension within the school.

Within the school there are a number of premises matters that we are working on. The next big project for the school is the Sports Hall. A lot of work has already gone on behind the scenes to

get this project ready. It is hoped that the first phase will start in the next 12 months. Fundraising will then begin to work towards phase two – a complete extension of the current sports hall creating a new sports centre with gym, weights room, fitness studio, entrance lobby, café etc. The ultimate aim, which is to improve the environment the students and staff experience in PE, is the main focus. It is an exciting project and I feel reassured that the people working on this are experienced and positive towards it.

Following on from the Sports Hall, the next big project of the school will be to do something about the last huts in the school: rooms 90, 91, 92 and 93 etc. This is a long term project but it is hoped a third building, similar to the 6th Form block and Applied Learning block will replace those rooms.

Opportunities to further link with the wider community are being developed: 1st XV vs. Old Boys as already mentioned will take place in March, the Community Carol Service, which saw an increase in numbers in December, but not what it could be. What was most disappointing about that event was the number of current MGS students in attendance. Attendance of current students and parents at school events is something I particularly feel passionate about. I would like to see many more parents at evening school concerts and sport fixtures on a Saturday mornings for example. Strengthening the involvement of the PA and Old Maidstonian Society is something we are also working on. All these things should encourage Old Maidstonians, friends of the school, and parents to remain close to the school and give something back now and in the future.

Finally, one of the biggest legacies I wish to leave at MGS is a Development/Alumni Office. Schools that don't have a Development Office which seeks to bring additional funds into the school are missing a trick. The creation of such an office will take time to do right, but it is about engaging the community to give something back to the school. The state provides the bread and butter to deliver an education, but we would like to provide some jam. I have seen what similar developments have achieved in other schools and their impact on the students. We want the best for the students, but it is becoming increasingly a situation where individual schools need to be more proactive and seek support elsewhere, other than from the normal sources. It all links in: strengthen the engagement we have with the community, live and work by our values, raise standards. This will all contribute to making the school a better place to remain part of. The allegiance and loyalty to this school is one of its unique selling points. We need to utilise this as best as possible and one of the ways we can start is by ensuring that every single leaver this year joins the OMS – it costs nothing to do so and results in their continuing association with the school.

I have said a great deal but it hopefully has provided you with an idea of some of the things I have been thinking about and what we want to work on over the next few years.

As I said back in September I am here for the long haul and I wish to make a positive and sustained impact on the students and staff at Maidstone Grammar School and I will do so with pleasure and dedication.

Thank you very much.

