

4<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Dear Parent/ Carer,

Last week I led our year group assemblies. The theme was broadly that of resetting our fabulous academy by asking the question: 'what makes a George Salter student'? Spoiler alert, somewhat surprisingly the answer is a hot cross bun!

Initially I referred to the changes made over 100 years ago to introduce compulsory education for all. I concluded that rather like the factory model production line, schools were tasked with taking the raw material, a student, and putting them through various processes before producing an end product: a young adult ready to join the workforce in a factory, mine or mill. I then took the time to revisit our academy mission and values and make it quite clear that we are about so much more than this at GSA. I referred to the visits, such as the recent ones to Dudley Zoo and Walsall Art Gallery, the inter house competitions, guest speakers, and all of our safeguarding work. I make it quite clear that we are unashamedly ambitious for every child and that we want our students to go and change the world for the better. Our world is a better place because George Salter children are in it!

My next slide focused on my fears that the world is a very angry place at the moment. I referred to the COVID-19 pandemic: my own personal experience of the virus, the sense of loss that we feel, our anger at lost time. I talk about how as a white middle class and, now, middle-aged male, part of me feels a phony leading a beautifully multi-ethnic academy. I talked briefly about Black Lives Matter and how we must have a proper national debate on what this really means. Over the last two years I have sought to be better educated on this issue: I have read David Olosuga, Sathnam Sanghera and James Baldwin. I refer to anger over events in Gozny, Aleppo, Palestine and Ukraine. I made the point that education is the answer: war and violence never lead to the right sustainable kind of solutions.

Against this backdrop of loss and anger our academy can and does function as an oasis of calm and positivity. I reminded students of the need for them to reflect on their appearance, attendance, work rate and manners. I spent some considerable time talking about relationships. I have been married 25 years this week and I know that relationships are what makes life worth living: they are fun and exciting but can also be quiet painful. What we have to do is talk through the hard times and good time will undoubtedly come. This message seems especially hard in a post pandemic world.

Finally I showed the students a sandwich made from chocolate spread and butter – the good stuff just like attending school and working hard. I then added horrible ingredients – the bad stuff such as marmite and chilli sauce to reflect the unfortunate things a student may do such as disobedience and lateness. I then take a big bite out of the dirty sandwich. The taste is not surprisingly atrocious. This is the taste we do not want students to leave us with at the end of the day, week, term or year.



There is, of course, at this time of the year the magic of the hot cross bun to celebrate: a bun which has all the good things working together in perfect harmony. I then took one of these buns and bit into it describing all the good feelings that it brings and consequently that school can bring when we do things the right way.

I am well aware that, this term, we have seen some behaviours on our perimeter involving adults before and after school, which have not been acceptable. We cannot see such incidents be repeated: we are a safe, orderly community which wants to do its very best for young people. We do not profess to get everything right but there is no lack of desire in trying to do our very best. I would ask all in our community to reflect on my assembly theme this week and support our endeavours in partnership and a sense of harmony. You will see on the academy Facebook page and on the website that there is an opportunity once every half term to book a meeting with me and share things that you feel that I should know. The young people should tell you that I am not a distant headteacher and that I care passionately. I do so because I know our young people can be, and generally are, better than ever. They can tackle the world and change it for the better.

Thank you for all your support

Yours sincerely,

Mr A Price  
Principal