



22nd August 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Start of Term Updates – September 2024

Welcome back. Whether you are continuing the Swanshurst journey with your child, or you are joining us for the first time as a new Year 7 or Year 12 parent/carer, we are really looking forward to working with you in the year ahead. This letter provides you with lots of useful information about the start of term in one place so please read carefully. We hope you find it useful and feel well informed before the new term begins.

Fantastic Results – Year 11 and 6th Form

We were delighted to welcome Year 13 and Year 11 into school to collect their examination results during the summer. The achievements of all pupils have again shown that hard work leads to success, and that Swanshurst continues to provide a superb education which leads to strong outcomes. As you will know Ofsted highlighted that “All pupils, including disadvantaged pupils, achieve strong outcomes”.

This is true again in 2024. In 6th form, our key measures remain strong, and the majority of pupils are progressing to excellent universities, apprenticeship providers and employers to continue their education or to begin their careers. Students progressing to university are going on to study Dentistry, Medicine, Law, Pharmacy, Optometry, Fine Art, Radiography, Nursing, Neuroscience, and Architecture amongst many others.

In KS4 once again, students have achieved excellent results. We are especially pleased that the number of pupils achieving grade 9-4 in English and Maths has increased again to 73%, Combined Science results in all areas are the best they have ever been, as are results in GCSE History, Biology, Chemistry and Physics.

Like all of you, we feel incredibly proud of pupils, and I would like to take this opportunity to say thank-you to staff for their skill and efforts leading up to the summer examinations. Thank you also to all of you, our parents and carers, for your continued support. We know you will join us in congratulating all pupils on their achievements and wish them all the very best in their next steps. We are looking forward to welcoming another very full cohort of Year 12 pupils in September during 6th form enrolment to continue their journey with us.

Congratulations Letter from Ofsted

Towards the end of the summer term, I received a congratulatory letter for our school from the HM Chief Inspector who said: “The inspection framework sets a high bar for being judged outstanding, which makes it a challenging and exacting standard to achieve. I would therefore like to commend you and your team on your exceptional work. I hope that you and your whole school community are very proud”.

We know you will be exceptionally proud of the judgement Swanshurst received. As a parent or carer in our community, you are part of that success and we’re sure you will share our feelings not only for the report that was written about our school, but also for this congratulatory letter.

School Priorities 24-25

A great school is built on great leadership and partnership with you at home. Each year, staff and governors carry out extensive evaluation activities to ensure we remain exceptional. This year, our main school development priorities cover 4 main areas to sustain excellence and it is important that you know about these. This will enable you to be familiar with the priorities your child may talk about at home. For example, reading, homework and independent learning skills are areas where you will see further developments this year.

We will continue to grow and develop Swanshurst in these areas:

1. Sustaining Exceptional Teaching by:
 - a. Continuing to 'Teach to the top' using demanding texts and 'Thinking Hard' strategies
 - b. Continuing to take every opportunity to create awe and wonder, a love of learning and build curriculum connections
2. Sustaining Exceptional Learning by:
 - a. Continuing to maximise all opportunities for pupils to achieve the Pupil Pledge in full
 - b. Introducing new sequencing for independent learning (homework)
3. Further develop adaptations for SEND pupils by:
 - a. Continuing to drive and incentivise SEND pupils' participation in all parts of school life, especially extra curricula opportunities
 - b. Continuing to adapt tasks and activities so that all SEND learners' needs are met
4. Provide support for those who most need it by:
 - a. Implementing a renewed approach to our 'Pupil Premium First' strategy
 - b. Continuing to drive our rewards policy to achieve exceptional levels of attendance and engagement.

Once pupils are settled back into the new term, we will write to you to outline our independent learning (homework) programme for the year with suggestions on how best to support your child/ren in their work.

West Midlands Academy Trust

As we move into the new academic year, our reflections on past achievements move to our future plans to secure the continued success of Swanshurst. We're sure you will join us in feeling a sense of satisfaction in our work as we are now in a position to help support and collaborate with other like-minded schools locally. We are doing this through our progress towards becoming an academy and joining the newly established West Midlands Academy Trust.

As you know, we wrote towards the end of the summer term about strike action from the National Education Union that could extend into the new academic year. Throughout the summer we have continued to work hard to avert this but wanted to bring you up to date on where we are with the union. Some Q&A are included in the **attached document**.

Continuing our partnership with families

As your child joins their new year group, it is important to note the fastest and most effective way to communicate with their pastoral team. The names of each Head of Year and the associated email address to reach your child's team are:

Year 7	Mrs J Wright	year7postbox@swanshurst.org
Year 8	Mrs N Bowler	year8postbox@swanshurst.org
Year 9	Ms J Revell	year9postbox@swanshurst.org
Year 10	Ms L Broadbent	year10postbox@swanshurst.org
Year 11	Ms R Cheema	year11postbox@swanshurst.org
Year 12 and 13	Mr M Smith	sixthformpostbox@swanshurst.org

Key dates for this half term

Swanshurst is a busy and exciting place to be – there is always a lot on offer and many things to engage with for pupils and parents/ carers. To help you to plan as a family, here are the key dates for the half term ahead:

Wednesday 4 th September	Year 7 Values Day and Year 12 Enrolment
Wednesday 11 th September	Open Evening
W/C 16 th September	Open Mornings
Wednesday 18 th September	Year 11 Parent/Carer Information Evening
W/C 30 th September	Year 12 Assessment Week
Wednesday 16 th October	Year 13 Parent/Carers' Evening
Wednesday 23 rd October	Year 7 Settling In Evening

As always, thank you for your continued support and engagement in our partnership work with you during your child's time at Swanshurst.

Yours faithfully,

Mr M Dunn
Head Teacher

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Potential industrial action by some members of the National Education Union (NEU)

Why are some NEU members taking strike action?

One of the key issues to be raised by the NEU is staff terms and conditions in the event we become an academy and join the West Midlands Academy Trust (WMAT). Throughout our extensive consultation activities, we have been able to provide firm assurances to staff on the protection of their terms and conditions of employment.

For the majority, these assurances have been welcomed and accepted. However, for a number of members of the NEU and to everyone's disappointment, these assurances have been deemed insufficient.

We have reiterated in writing to all staff that there is no threat to terms and conditions for teachers or support staff. We have guaranteed that WMAT will continue to follow national terms and conditions for all staff and adhere to all necessary consultation activities in the future, just as Birmingham City Council does now.

Having made these commitments and repeated them many times, we are left unclear on the reasons for the NEU's reasons for dispute.

Have staff's views been gathered and considered?

Yes, extensively. Our staff are our most important resource, and the Governing Body would not make any decision which has a detrimental impact on staff. We have engaged in ongoing dialogue, informal and formal consultation with staff. We have ensured parents and pupils remain up to date since January 2024.

As well as many ongoing conversations, there have been a total of nine separate activities in which staff have been updated and given the opportunity to share their views. The views expressed have been shared fully with the Governing Body to inform their decision-making process.

Does this apply to all NEU members?

No. Some NEU members have been satisfied with the assurance we have provided and did not vote or act to take strike action. The total number of those who took strike action represents approximately 32% of our teachers and 16% of our total staff body. Whilst we want everyone to be happy with our plans for the future, this demonstrates that the NEU's stance is not that of the majority.

Is there to be any more strike action?

Potentially, yes. We are extremely disappointed that the NEU have suggested further strike days to its members. We know many of you will share this feeling, both because of the disruption it causes to your child's education but also the wider disruption it causes to family life and commitments that parents and carers have. If these proposed strike days go ahead, we will be able to open the school but unfortunately this will not be for all pupils. We have been notified of the following days of potential strike action in September:

- Friday 06 September 2024
- Wednesday 11 September 2024
- Friday 20 September 2024
- Wednesday 25 September 2024
- Monday 30 September 2024

We have expressed our disappointment and concern with this to the NEU. We have notified the NEU that we are willing to pause the process of our conversion to become an academy whilst further constructive discussions take place to provide further assurance about the protection of staff's terms and conditions as we convert to become an academy.

The NEU have not yet confirmed they are willing to reach this compromise. We have set a deadline of 3rd September to hear from the NEU so that we can plan effectively. We will therefore write with an update on 3rd September to all parents/ carers.

If the NEU continue, how will school operate on these days?

Year 11 and Year 13 will not miss any time at school. Year 7 will also be prioritised to support their effective transition to secondary school.

School will be open to selected year groups on each day of industrial action if it goes ahead. Year groups who are not in school will be set work to complete remotely at home, just as we did in 2022-2023 when national industrial action took place regarding teacher pay and when we had to adjust attendance when our gas supply was interrupted. Vulnerable and pupils with an EHCP will be catered for in school. Pupils who are eligible for free school meals will be invited to collect a lunch package on each day. The schedule of attendance will be as follows:

Date	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13
06.09.24	In school	Home Learning	Home Learning	Home Learning	In school	Home Learning	In school
11.09.24	In school	Home Learning	Home Learning	Home Learning	In school	Home Learning	In school
20.09.24	In school	In school	Home Learning	Home Learning	In school	Home Learning	In school
25.09.24	Home Learning	Home Learning	In school	Home Learning	In school	Home Learning	In school
30.09.24	Home Learning	Home Learning	Home Learning	In school	In school	Home Learning	In school

We expect that many pupils will be taught their normal lessons by their usual teacher. Where this is not possible, arrangements will be made for classes to take place with adjustments.

The above is subject to change. If amendments to our plans are needed, we will notify families and pupils as soon as possible and we will provide a confirmation of plans on 3rd September.

If the NEU agree to our request to pause their action and/ or a resolution to the dispute is reached, we will again notify you as soon as possible.

What are you doing to resolve this dispute?

We continue our commitment to constructive discussion with NEU as well as all other trade unions who represent Swanshurst's staff. We have communicated with NEU during the summer holiday. Unfortunately, so far our attempts with NEU's representatives have been unsuccessful as they are unwilling to accept our firm assurances. We have invited further discussions and hope to resolve the current dispute the NEU have initiated as soon as possible.

As set out previously, there is a very clear rationale for the proposal to become one of the founding members of WMAT and we remain committed to ensuring the best possible education for our students and the continued success of Swanshurst School. A full summary of the key information can be found [here](#).

Thank you in advance for your understanding and support during this period. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact school via enquiry@swanshurst.org.