

Friday 26th January 2018

Dear Parent / Carer,

In relation to the recent media coverage regarding Progress 8, I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you with more information about Altwood's own progress, and the measurement as a whole. I also want to reassure you that we are focussed on continuous improvement and, as Ofsted stated in October, 'Pupils currently in the school are making good progress.'

Progress 8 measures a student's progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 across 8 key subjects in 3 groups; (i) English Language or English Literature, mathematics (ii) three subjects from geography, history, French, Spanish, computer science and the sciences (iii) any other three subjects. For the purpose of Progress 8 it is only the reading and maths scores from Key Stage 2 tests which are used.

This year's measurements relate to exams taken last summer and technical changes to the system used to calculate these results has had a major impact on schools, as some of you may be aware.

Under the new measurements, Altwood is one of a few schools that are improving rapidly but find themselves categorised as underperforming. There are several reasons for this and we feel that it is important for parents, carers and the whole school community to be aware of the determining factors.

As you know, we are a small, community focused school, which we believe has many benefits, especially in terms of our ability to know each of our students well, and cater for their individual needs. However, this can have an impact when it comes to measuring performance using statistics and data, as one student can represent a large percentage in our small school. In our case, some of our students do not have Key Stage 2 data when they join us, which means that their progress is not included in our data. This could be because their primary school might not take part in Key Stage 2 Tests, they may have been unwell and did not take the test or they may have come from abroad and started their secondary school career later than others. In turn, that means this year's results do not offer an accurate insight into Altwood's overall progress, or that of our pupils.

We do not insist students take a full complement of subjects in group (ii) as it may not be in their best interests. However, for our school this inevitably means our Progress 8 score will suffer. We believe as a faith school that we should offer a curriculum which best fits the needs of our learners rather than the political agenda of the government in power at the time. We do however; continue to evaluate our curriculum offer to ensure it meets the needs for each cohort of students.

We have a strong moral purpose and so this can mean that for some students the priority is preserving parts of their education and providing them with a safe environment is more important than ensuring that they sit 8 subjects; again this will impact on our outcomes.

In our recent Ofsted inspection, dated October 2017, we were judged as good in all areas. The inspectors knew our progress data for the last academic year and they also viewed our shadow data, which reflected the students who took a full complement of exams and who had data from Key Stage 2 exams. This gives a very different and much more positive Progress 8 figure for Altwood, which is a more accurate reflection of our overall performance.

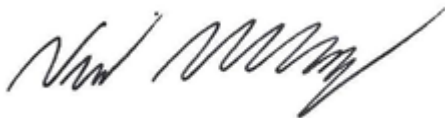
Ofsted's report in October cited several areas which have improved, including:

- 'Progress made by pupils seen in mathematics, English, modern foreign languages, product design, drama and art is above expectations.'
- Pupils '...make accelerated progress...' in literacy across Years 7 and 8
- The school's own baseline data on those pupils (without KS2 data) showed they had made good progress.'

There is a danger of looking at headlines or reading headlines without the full context. Progress is just one part of our story and our other headline measures show continued improvement. As pointed out by Geoff Barton, the General Secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, it is unfair that more schools find themselves in this situation 'because of the complex changes to the way in which this is calculated.' His point that performance tables 'only tell us a limited amount about the true quality of the school' is one worth reiterating.

The improvements that we've seen over the last two years are having a tremendous impact on our outcomes and we continue to have high aspirations for all our pupils. I am very proud of everything that our pupils and our staff have achieved, and I thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Neil Dimbleby', written in a cursive style.

Neil Dimbleby
Headteacher

