



The Priory School, Hitchin

Educating Students for Success in Life

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Headteacher: Mr M. Blayney MEd (Cantab)

5th September 2025
MB/ES

Dear Parent/Carer

Welcome from the headteacher

I am incredibly honoured to be writing to you for the first time as headteacher at The Priory School, Hitchin. Whether this is your child's first year at our school, or whether you are a parent of older children who have been here for some time, I am very pleased to welcome you to the new academic year.

I hope that you, and your family, had a restful summer break and, even if you weren't able to get away on holiday, I hope that a break from the normal routines brought with it some time to recuperate.

In this letter, I hope to provide you with some essential information, and updates in readiness for the new academic year. I will also be offering you some time to come into school and meet with me as I work towards shaping the new strategic direction of The Priory School to ensure that your child receives the very best education and school experience.

Examination results

We're extremely proud of our Year 13 and Year 11 students who have just completed their A-Levels, BTECs, Vocational courses, and GCSEs. There were many individual stories of success and our results continue to compare favourably to outcomes at a national level. In some subjects, The Priory School has exceeded national outcomes by a significant margin. We will continue to work hard in support of our new cohort of students taking their public examinations in 2026.

Strategic direction and parent forums

Part of my role as headteacher at The Priory School is to set the strategic direction that allows the school to provide the very best education for your child. We achieve this by developing a School Improvement Plan (SIP) that typically lasts for three years with a series of one-year actions. The SIP is reviewed annually to ensure that we are content with the strategic direction of the school and to allow us, if needs be, to add or remove actions where necessary.

In order to write a SIP that truly reflects the needs of the school, I must gain insights and views from as many stakeholders as possible. One vital stakeholder in the life of any school are the parents/carers of students. As such, I will be setting aside some time over the coming weeks to offer parents the chance to come into The Priory School and take part in some parent forums with me. Your views will then form part of our evidence-base when developing the new SIP.

If you would like to take part in a parent forum and share your views, please email Emma Sangster (esangster@priory.herts.sch.uk) who will be able to book you a place.

Key dates

Please see below some key dates for the term ahead that I hope you will be able to attend if applicable.

Thursday 11th September 2025: Welcome to the Sixth Form Evening (for Year 12 parents)
Thursday 18 September 2025: Welcome to Year 7 Evening
Thursday 25th September 2025: Welcome to Year 10 Evening
Thursday 2nd October 2025: Open Evening for September 2026 cohort (early closure at 1.30pm)
Thursday 13th November 2025: Year 13 Consultation Evening
Monday 24th November 2025: Year 11 Sixth Form Evening
Thursday 11th December 2025: Year 11 Parents' Evening (in-person)
Thursday 18th December 2025: Presentation Evening

I also include, attached to this letter, an updated version of our 'Key information for parents'.

Finally

Before I close, I thought I would share the updated 'Headteacher's Welcome' that has now been published on our website. I hope that you will share the vision of the school that I have tried to encapsulate and, it is my hope that we, as a home/school team, can make that vision a sustained reality for every child who is a member of The Priory School community.

I am delighted to welcome you to The Priory School, Hitchin.

At TPSH, we are committed to empowering every child to meet their aspirations, to be self-confident, inspirational, and active members of their community whatever their background, ability, or circumstance. We achieve this by ensuring that every child at TPSH follows a rich and ambitious curriculum, is offered extensive extra-curricular and enrichment opportunities, and that they benefit from inspirational teaching, alongside dedicated pastoral care that provides a secure and caring environment.

We are incredibly proud of our students who are superb ambassadors for our school when representing us in Hitchin but also nationally, and internationally. We are proud to serve the entire community of Hitchin and as such, we have a number of exciting partnerships with local and national organisations.

At TPSH our staff are well-qualified, highly experienced, and dedicated to providing the very best education and pastoral care to every student. We all share the same values that are woven into our school's culture: Responsibility, Respect, and Resilience.

A strong, supportive partnership between home and school is fundamental to the success of any child in education. As a parent myself, I fully appreciate that parents want to remain closely involved in their son or daughter's education and at TPSH, we will work in partnership to ensure that we can lay strong foundations for the future successes of your child.

Yours faithfully,



Matt Blayney
Headteacher



Key information for parents

At the start of the new academic year, I would like to draw your attention to key information about the school and our expectations.

The school day

The school day begins at 8.50am and ends at 3.30pm. There are five lessons per day and a registration session first thing in the morning. The shape of the school day is as follows:

Registration: 8.50am to 9.10am on Mondays, Tuesdays & Thursdays/ 9.00am to 9.10am on Wednesdays & Fridays

Period 1: 9.10am to 10.10am

Period 2: 10.10am to 11.10am/11.30am

Break for Year 7s and Year 10s: 10.30am to 10.50am

Break for Year 8s: 10.50am to 11.10am

Break for Year 9s and Year 11s: 11.10am to 11.30am

Period 3: 11.30am to 12.30pm

Lunch: 12.30pm to 1.30pm

Period 4 (incl. afternoon registration): 1.30pm to 2.30pm

Period 5: 2.30pm to 3.30pm

End of the school day

Beginning and end of the school day

Students are expected to arrive and leave the school site in their full school uniform and to behave in accordance with our expectations. Students may arrive on the school site from 8am onwards and breakfast is available in the school café. Please ensure that your child does not arrive on the school site before 8am.

At the end of the school day students may leave either through the main gate or via the side gate onto the school playing fields.

Attendance and punctuality

Department for Education research shows a clear link between high levels of school attendance and positive outcomes at GCSE/A-Level. In short, the more your child attends school, the more likely they are to achieve strong GCSE or A-Level results. Furthermore, recent evidence shows that a child who misses a day in the first week is 2.7 times more likely to become Persistently Absent (PA).

The minimum level of attendance required is 96% and any child falling below 90% will be classified as PA. The Priory School will always work to support children and families who are struggling to attend school regularly. However, if improvements are not made, then the local authority may issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) and may move to prosecution.

The school day starts for students at 8.50am, so the expectation is that they are in school by 8.45am to give themselves time to hand in their phones and get to their tutor room on time. The school monitors the

punctuality of students, and support strategies and sanctions will be used for identified persistent offenders where necessary. Punctuality between lessons is also monitored and we will contact home if there are issues.

Car parking

The main school car park during drop-off/pick-up times can become congested and is very busy with students transiting on foot or by bicycle. Please may all parents picking up their child/children be patient and respectful whilst remaining vigilant of students moving through the car park on foot or by bicycle.

If you are waiting to collect your child, please may we also ask that you turn off your engine to reduce the impact of exhaust fumes on our students.

Students transiting to and from school

When transiting to or from The Priory School, students remain under the authority of the school behaviour policy. We believe that our students are ambassadors of the school when in uniform and should be setting themselves the highest expectations and standards when engaging with the wider community of Hitchin. We would therefore appreciate it if you could talk to your child about the importance of representing the school and themselves in a positive way when in Hitchin.

Students using the local BP garage on Bedford Road also remain under the authority of The Priory School and thus are subject to our normal behaviour policy. Senior staff from The Priory School are on duty each afternoon by the garage and we will address concerns, in line with our behaviour policy, where required.

School policies

The school website includes all our statutory and other key policies that are regularly reviewed. These policies can be found by going to the home page and clicking on the 'About' tab. The school updates policies on a rotational basis, so from time-to-time specific policies may not be on the website. Please feel free to contact Emma Sangster (esangster@priory.herts.sch.uk) if you cannot access a specific policy.

Teaching and learning

At The Priory School we have very high aspirations for your child and their academic success. Our staff are well-qualified, highly experienced, and dedicated to providing the very best education and pastoral care to every student. We all share the same values that are woven into our school's culture: Responsibility, Respect, and Resilience.

We believe in a curriculum that challenges students to think critically, ask questions, and seek to build knowledge and skills. We also believe in making education decisions based upon the available academic research and use organisations such as the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) to guide our pedagogy. You can find curriculum information specific to each subject on our website.

Students must come to school prepared to study. High-quality sleep, the correct equipment, and homework completed to a high standard are vital in making academic success a reality.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

The Priory School's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is Mrs F. Nearney.

Upon arrival back at school, all students receive a safeguarding assembly and are reminded of the processes and systems in place to support them should they have any concerns. In addition to this, all students receive lessons in online safety and other key messages as part of their RSHE curriculum.

If you have any safeguarding concerns regarding your child or another child who attends The Priory School, please contact our Safeguarding and Child Protection team childprotection@priory.herts.sch.uk. If you have an urgent concern you can telephone the school, contact the Police using 999, or request support from Hertfordshire children's social care using the following link: [Report concerns about a child or request support | Hertfordshire County Council](#).

Student wellbeing

We take the wellbeing of your child incredibly seriously at The Priory School and want to support your child in being healthy and happy whilst they are part of the school community. This can be achieved in a variety of ways from group support to individual one-to-one support.

We work with a variety of external organisations, including the North Hertfordshire NHS Mental Health Support Team, NHS GRIT, the Hertfordshire School Nurse Service, and PHASE. Our in-school qualified counsellors are Miss Thompson (Tuesday to Friday) and Mrs Laycock (Friday).

The Senior Mental Health Lead at The Priory School is Mrs Omar. If there is ever a concern regarding your child's wellbeing, please do not hesitate to send her an email at cfollano@priory.herts.sch.uk.

Medical information

If your child has any updated medical information, please ensure that you email this to medical@priory.herts.sch.uk. It is vital that our records about your child are up to date so that we are able to support them appropriately. If the medical information remains the same as that provided on the essential forms originally handed in, or if you are aware that the school has already made any necessary updates to your child's records, you do not need to provide us with that information again. Please use this email address to update us throughout the year.

Parental communication

To ensure that our students make the best possible progress, it is essential that communication between the school and home is open, honest and in the best interests of the student. We will look to respond to enquiries as soon as possible and within two working days. Where more than two working days is required, a holding email will be sent outlining response timelines.

As a parent you can reasonably expect the following:

- Key information for parents.
- Written communication regarding events, changes, and plans for The Priory School.
- Additional information letters as required.
- Progress information relating to your child.
- Parents' evenings.
- Social media updates.

The Priory School can reasonably expect parents to:

- Work alongside The Priory School in the best interests of your child.
- Read and respond to letters or emails.
- Phone or email the school in order to book appointments or meetings.
- Attend your child's parents' evenings.
- Contact your child's form tutor or subject teacher in the first instance and avoid the temptation to escalate a matter to more senior colleagues until other channels have been explored.
- Keep us informed of changes in contact information and personal circumstances which affect your child – this is particularly important.
- Send emails directly to staff members but be sensitive to the fact that the first priority of every teacher is to teach their classes and that frequent emailing can be disruptive and counterproductive.
- Respect the work/life balance of staff and restrict emails that require a response to a working day, avoiding contacting staff during evenings, weekends and holidays.
- Raise concerns with an appropriate member of staff, in a polite manner that is likely to achieve a better outcome for your child, rather than making comments about the school on social media.

We can reasonably expect staff to:

- Reply to emails, phone messages and notes in the planner within two working days. There is no expectation that a member of staff should reply to any message received during a weekend or holiday until the next working week begins.
- Reply using a holding message if more than two days is required to investigate the matter raised.
- Use an appropriately formal tone in emails and letters to parents.
- Not reply to any email or letter that is rude or aggressive in tone or content, or sent out of reasonable working hours, but pass the letter to their line manager.

We expect everyone to:

- Be calm, friendly and polite in all communications (including in writing, in face-to-face meetings, during parents' evenings, phone conversations and at school events).
- Have respect for each other.
- Set out to build and maintain a positive home/school relationship in the interests of the child.

Behaviour for Learning

At The Priory School, we believe that high expectations and standards of behaviour are crucial in supporting children to achieve their ambitions and access the very best learning environment. Furthermore, everyone at The Priory School has a right to come to school or work each day without having to experience poor or disrespectful behaviour.

The school's Behaviour for Learning policy is published on our website and outlines our expectations and standards. We also ensure that students are briefed on these expectations when they arrive at our school. Our Behaviour for Learning policy, in conjunction with the Anti-Bullying policy, Drugs policy and Searching, Screening & Confiscation policy, provides the framework for how we deliver a safe learning environment for all students and staff.

Research shows that where parents and carers support the school in applying sanctions or consequences for behaviour that falls short of our expectations, the child often goes on to regulate or alter the behaviours that resulted in the initial sanction or consequence.

The Priory School's expectations of behaviour and conduct also extend outside of the school premise and we work closely with the police, children's social services, and other external agencies where concerns are raised. The school reserves the right to take interest in and impose sanctions for any misconduct by any student at any time, beyond the bounds of the school day/week/term, where such misconduct prejudices the good order and welfare of the school and its students or brings The Priory School into disrepute.

School detentions will be held in the school hall from 3.30pm on each afternoon from Monday to Thursday.

Students who attend their detention on time can leave after 45 minutes if they are working or reading (otherwise detentions are an hour long). Those who miss a detention without good reason will sit a 90-minute SLT detention on a Thursday afternoon. Please note that you as parents/carers always receive a notification of a detention 48 hours before it is due to be sat and your child is notified in three different ways at school.

I am pleased to say that the vast majority of students at The Priory School have excellent behaviour and are a credit to their families and local community.

Recognising achievement

We aim to acknowledge students' achievement both in and outside school hours as often as we can. Students have the opportunity to pick up daily reward points, as well as Headteacher commendations.

Parents can make nominations for Headteacher commendations for achievements outside of school hours by emailing Emma Sangster (esangster@priory.herts.sch.uk). Reward points can be exchanged for items in the reward shop, which is open every Monday.

This includes items of stationery, footballs, netballs, calculators, revision materials and power banks for their phones. Our Heads of Year will also be promoting rewards incentives and trips with thresholds for behaviour

and reward points. This includes trips to local places like Gravity and further afield to Southend and Winter Wonderland.

School uniform

At The Priory School we believe that school uniform unites all students, no matter what their background, into a single school community. It also supports students to focus on their learning without the distraction of deciding what to wear each day.

At the present time, we will be continuing with the following protocols. However, after we have conducted the SIP, this protocol may change. We will write to you separately regarding any changes.

- Key Stage 4 students (Years 10 and 11) will come to school wearing their full school uniform and change for PE. They are expected to have their blazers with them every day – their grey jumper is optional.
- Key Stage 3 students (Years 7, 8 and 9) can still come to school wearing PE kit on the days they have PE. They should always have their red jumper with them on 'normal uniform' days.
- Cycling shorts are not to be worn.

Make-up and jewellery

The school policy is that students do not wear make-up or jewellery (including any kind of studs/sleepers) and, like the rest of our uniform policy, this is non-negotiable. Please note that if students get their ears pierced during term time, they must wear clear spacers until the healing has pierced sufficiently enough for them to remove their earrings on a daily basis.

Financial support

For families who are struggling to cover the financial costs of educating their child, various support grants are available. Uniform grants are available through the Hitchin Education Foundation and an application form can be found on our school website (<https://www.priory.herts.sch.uk/information/financial-support/>). If your financial circumstances have changed over the summer holidays, I would strongly urge you to look to see if you are eligible for free school meals (<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/schools-and-education/at-school/free-school-meals/free-school-meals.aspx>).

We are also able to provide limited financial support for school journeys and trips. Please contact the school's Finance Office (finance@priory.herts.sch.uk) for further information.

Chromebooks, Google Classroom and Security

Students are expected to charge their Chromebook every night so that they are able to benefit from using their device in all lessons throughout the day. Please remember that any damage or accidents must be reported to Network Support immediately and that the protective case should be used at all times when transporting the device.

We recommend that you download the Securly app to monitor your child's Chromebook use outside of school and remind you that you can also sign up to guardian summaries on Google Classroom to check upcoming assignments and activity.

More details on the Securly app and how to sign up for guardian summaries will be sent separately to all parents.

RSHE

Your child will participate in RSHE (Relationships, Sex and Health Education) for one lesson a fortnight throughout the year. The content of these subjects is listed on the school website under RSHE & Citizenship. Should you wish to discuss this further, please do not hesitate to contact Mrs Omar on cfollano@priory.herts.sch.uk.