

PURCELL PARENT NEWSLETTER

13th September 2024

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Thank you for all you have done to help us navigate this first week of the new year so successfully. I am always amazed by how quickly new students integrate themselves into the school and start to feel at home. Houseparents will be keeping a close eye on all new students over the coming weeks to make sure they settle into routines well and remain happy. Should you have any concerns about your child (especially if they are new to us) please don't hesitate to get in touch with the house staff. It's much better to alert us to a "niggle" before it can develop into a problem. Even if it proves to be nothing, we would rather be aware than not.

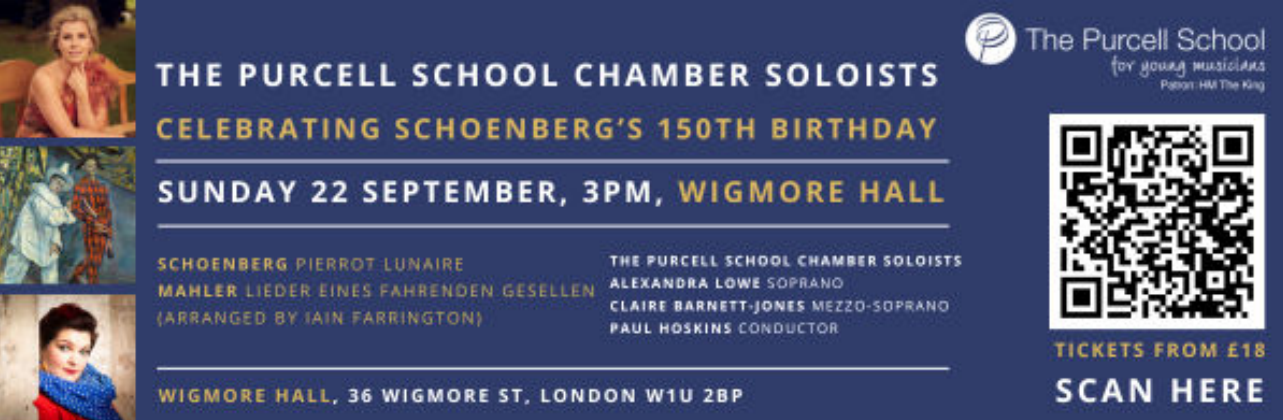
For those who are new to us, we generally try to manage all emerging issues directly with students in school where possible (especially with boarders). We will contact you when we feel it's necessary, either just for information or to seek your help and support, but we won't be sending a "running commentary" on each and every small issue as they arise. You are, of course, welcome to contact us at any time if you have any questions or concerns and all the contact details for staff are listed in the Parent Handbook.


Principal's Vlog

Those who were with us last year will remember I began a series of Principal's Vlogs and then they "died a death" as the year went along! I know that many of you enjoyed these (in fact it seemed to be one of the most popular things

I've done!), so I'm going to try and reinstate them this year with renewed vigour. Usually I get out and about around the school and try to show things you don't normally see or introduce you to people you don't always meet. I'll do

my best to produce a couple each half term but won't (yet) tie myself down to publishing them on specific days. I hope you enjoy them and find them interesting.




 The Purcell School
for young musicians
Patron: HM The King




THE PURCELL SCHOOL CHAMBER SOLOISTS
CELEBRATING SCHOENBERG'S 150TH BIRTHDAY
SUNDAY 22 SEPTEMBER, 3PM, WIGMORE HALL

SCHOENBERG PIERROT LUNAIRE
MAHLER LIEDER EINES FAHRENDEN GESELLEN
(ARRANGED BY IAIN FARRINGTON)

THE PURCELL SCHOOL CHAMBER SOLOISTS
ALEXANDRA LOWE SOPRANO
CLAIRE BARNETT-JONES MEZZO-SOPRANO
PAUL HOSKINS CONDUCTOR



TICKETS FROM £18
SCAN HERE



Politics and VAT

You will no doubt be aware from the news that the new Government is proposing to bring forward its policy of imposing VAT on 'private school' fees (and the removal of business rate concessions) to take effect from January 2025, rather than September 2025 as originally intended. I want to take a little time to explain how the School has been responding to this.

Prior to the election, we had been trying to engage with the Labour Party to understand how their headline policy was envisaged to work for the Music and Dance Scheme (MDS) Schools. We were successful in being able to make petitions to the (then) Shadow Schools Minister, but wholly unsuccessful in getting any answers to specific questions about how this policy was envisaged to impact on those schools operating the MDS. It was quite clear that, at this point, there were no answers and that the party line ("there will be no exceptions") was trotted out on almost all occasions.

Following the election, we have stepped up the dialogue. As Chair of the MDS Schools Group, I have been lobbying hard on behalf of the MDS schools (as have individual schools) to make the case that our schools - which work on behalf of the Government and are (for the significant part) funded by the Government -

should fall outside of the scope of this new policy. We have successfully engaged with the Secretary of State, Minister for Schools Standards, senior officials at the Department for Education and officials at the Treasury. We have also engaged a number of sympathetic advocates, most notably in the House of Lords, some of whom were primed to raise the concerns of MDS schools in the Lords debate last week.

The bottom line is that there are still no answers and certainly there have been no commitments from the Government about a way forward. However, some light is beginning to emerge. I presented our case to a massed delegation of DfE and treasury officials last week and there is no question that they got the message loud and clear. They clearly understand that the demographic of our schools is different from the wider 'private school' sector, as is the function we serve. Of course, they are not the decision makers, but these officials will be the ones advising ministers when they come to make their decisions about how the policy should be implemented and the impact on our schools. Most significantly, in a statement in the House of Lords last week, Baroness Smith, who is one of the decision makers, said the following:

"I turn to the issues raised by the noble Baronesses, Lady Fraser and Lady Bull, about the enormously important contribution of Music and Dance Scheme schools . . . We are continuing to engage with the schools currently within the Music and Dance Scheme project. As has already been outlined by noble Lords—and I wholly agree that, for the good of all of us, we need low-income families to be able to send their children to those schools when they have that talent—the children of parents who cannot afford the fees are funded by the Music and Dance Scheme. We will consider, in the light of the VAT charges, how and whether we can change that scheme to compensate for the VAT issue. We are willing to carry on talking, as we have done, to representatives from the Music and Dance Scheme schools about the impact of this change of policy".

This is a very significant and important statement given Baroness Smith's position as a serving Education Minister and demonstrates that the work undertaken thus far has now reached the ears of those who will make key decisions.

We will be making written submissions to the Treasury in the next few days and I will continue to engage with ministers and officials on behalf of the MDS Schools group. We do not expect to

hear any final decision about where MDS schools fall within the new policy until the budget on October 30th or shortly afterwards.

I know that many will be anxious about the whole VAT

issue and uncertain about how it might work and what it might mean for you. I am sorry that I am unable to do anything to soothe those anxieties at this stage and am equally sorry that I have, as yet, no concrete answers about how this policy

may, or may not, impact our school. However, please rest assured that I am working hard to shape and influence the implementation of this policy, and will keep you up to date as any new or significant developments occur.

Parent Code of Conduct

One of the great joys of working at The Purcell School is the very good relationships we have with you, our parent body. Almost without exception, parents are supportive, cooperative and work alongside us for the good of our young people. After all, we all want the best for our students - your children - and it's in everybody's interest that we do work together. However, there have been some

occasions where parents have behaved inappropriately or aggressively towards staff and, very sadly, we have had an increase in the number of such incidents over the past couple of years. As well as having a duty of care towards our students, I also have a duty of care to the school's staff. Sadly, it has become necessary to articulate really clearly how we expect parents to engage with the school and what is (and is

not) appropriate when dealing with staff and attending school events. A new Parent Code of Conduct can be found [here](#). There is nothing in it which is unreasonable and it supports the School's existing Terms and Conditions so please take a moment to read it through and then, hopefully, you'll never need to read it again.

Let's All Talk Mental Health

We are very pleased to write to you about our ongoing pastoral partnership, which continues to provide free mental health resources and support to parents and carers of students who may be struggling with their mental health. Whether you are new to our school or have been with us for a while, we want to ensure you have access to these valuable resources.

Through **Let's All Talk Mental Health**, all parents can now access over 30 live online sessions throughout the year covering a wide range of teen

mental health issues featuring the UK's leading Clinical Psychologists, Experts and Advocates. Every live session dedicates at least 30 minutes to anonymous audience Q&A PLUS parents can benefit from an extensive online library of 60+ sessions to watch on-demand.

Let's all Talk Mental Health can provide help, guidance and resources for parents to navigate the complexities of their teens' mental health with confidence whenever they want, wherever they want, and for however long they need it:

- **Expert Insight:** What to say and what NOT to say.
- **Practical Advice:** Useful tips and strategies to help and support at home.
- **Understanding of Issues:** In-depth information to help parents understand teen mental health challenges.
- **Guidance on Treatment:** Tips for navigating the right routes to treatment.

For more information visit [Let's all Talk Mental Health](#)

Live sessions coming up:

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| Monday 16th September, 8pm | Teen Friendship Issues – Do's & Don'ts for Parents |
| Monday 23rd September, 8pm | Neurodiversity – A Parent's Guide |
| Monday 30th September, 8pm | Eating Disorders in Teens: Causes, Signs, and Support |

Don't worry if you can't join LIVE in September – every hour-long session is available on-demand directly after the online session and if you want to put a question to the experts, you can even email your questions in advance to the [LATMH team](#).

We kindly ask you to register for your pass for the upcoming academic year using this unique link: [Purcell Access Link](#). Even if you have registered in previous years, a new registration is required.

Please allow a few minutes for an email from **Contrast** with your access link for the Let's all Talk Mental Health Hub (please do check your junk folder if the email doesn't appear in your inbox). Follow the link, click on any of the icons and use the email address that you registered with. If you wish to **remain anonymous** during Q&A, please create an alias with First/Last name.

You can contact the team at hello@letsalltalkmentalhealth.co.uk if you need any assistance accessing the hub.

Once you have registered there is an easy access link to the hub [here](#).

We really hope that you find these resources helpful.

Academic Reminders

We hope children have settled into their new classes and are enjoying their subjects. Just a few reminders of key dates for this academic year:

Parents' Evenings (more information on bookings and appointments nearer the time)

Autumn Term

Year 12 - Friday 22nd November (exeat weekend)

Spring Term

Year 11 - Friday 24th January (exeat weekend)

Year 13 - Friday 14th February (Friday before half term)

Year 9 - Friday 14th March (exeat weekend)

Year 7&8 - Friday 28th March

Summer Term

Year 10 - Friday 2nd May (Bank Holiday exeat weekend)

Assessment Weeks

Week beginning 4th

November - in-class assessments for all year groups.

Week beginning 20th January

- Year 11&13 mock exams; while Years 7-10, and Year 12 complete in-class assessments

9th June - Year 10&12 core mock exams; all other years have in-class assessments

Exeat Weekend in Summer Term

Please note there was an omission to the term dates for the first half of the summer term in 2025. There will be an Exeat weekend from Saturday 3rd to Monday 5th May 2025 to coincide with the Bank Holiday Monday so please plan accordingly. The revised term dates can be found [here](#).

Safeguarding

As part of our desire to ensure that your children are safe, happy and healthy whilst at Purcell, we have a strong pastoral and safeguarding team who work across the school to ensure that all children achieve their best outcomes. We at Purcell believe that all students have a right to be safeguarded from harm and exploitation regardless of race, ethnicity, age, gender or disability. Every member of staff is trained in Safeguarding and Child Protection in order to better recognise children in need and to help accordingly.

Our Safeguarding Team is headed by **Ziggi Szafranski**, who is the School's Designated Safeguarding Lead, or DSL. His deputy DSLs are **Paul**

Bambrough (Principal), **Tom Burns** (Vice-Principal), **Jane Mitchell** (Director of Boarding), **Paul Hoskins** (Director of Music), **Sally-Ann Whitty** (Learning Support), and **Debbie Shah** (Accompanist). They work with the wider pastoral team, which includes Houseparents and other House staff, the Medical Team (School Nurses **Hilary Austin** and **Carol Morgan**, School Counsellor **Nicky Morris** and Physiotherapist **Dr. Sarah Upjohn**) and the students' Tutors.

On the school website, we have a section dedicated to Current Parents (accessible directly via [this link](#)) which contains some fact sheets that we have produced to help you understand some of the

challenges facing children. We will be adding to these periodically so do check back and have a look. If you want more information on anything please don't hesitate to get in touch with us.

If you have any questions about Safeguarding, or want to raise something with the team, you can always email safeguarding@purcell-school.org at any time, or call the school office on 01923 331100 during office hours. There is always a member of the team on site whenever students are here and we are always happy to help.

With all good wishes



Paul Bambrough
Principal

