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Plymouth High School for Girls

"For life, not school, we learn"

4th September 2026

Dear Parents and Carers,

Although we have only been back at school for a few days, it already feels like we are gearing up for a successful year. Year 7 have been cheerful and resilient, and I have very much enjoyed seeing them getting used to our school, finding their way around and making friends. Year 12 seem to have settled in well and already look to be a fabulous year group. I have been so impressed with their attitude to study and determination to get the best possible grades.

Year 11 and 13 are starting to think about their mocks which start after the October half-term with the 'second' mocks before Easter. Teachers will be helping the students to prepare by providing resources and tasks to complete and there are revision sessions in school.

As always, the support young people get from their parents/carers plays a huge role in helping them to be successful. Talking with your child about the revision they are doing and how they are scheduling their workload can be very helpful. Maintaining a dialogue at home about mock preparation and what help might be needed from the teachers will enable Year 11 and 13 students to feel in control of what they are doing and more prepared for the challenges ahead. Thank you to our parents and carers in advance for the support they will give at home.

Spotlight on student excellence

At the end of our Summer term, we congratulated the following students who were celebrated for demonstrating commitment to our school values and ethos:



- Group of the week: **Zuzanna B and Gabi B, Year 12** “These students joined our Year 7 CEW trip to the Isles of Scilly. They were exceptional members of the team, who worked well together to ensure all students were well cared for, entertained and supported. They were also super company for us adults particularly during the packed lunch/sandwich making conveyor belt!” Nominated by Mrs Gill, Mr Britz-Colwill, and Mr Thackray.
- Individual student of the week: **Annabelle H, Year 7** “Annabelle made such wonderful sweet treats during curriculum enrichment week and was so generous in sharing them around. True PHSG spirit.” Nominated by Mr Underdown.

Allergy awareness

To help keep all pupils safe, please ensure that we have up-to-date information about any allergies your child may have. Accurate allergy information enables us to put appropriate support plans in place, train staff effectively, and respond quickly in an emergency. We all have a part to play in creating a safe environment, including following our nut-aware policy and being mindful of the food brought into school. If your child has an allergy, please update their details via Arbor.

Free School Meals (FSM) allowance and eligibility changes

School Meals (FSM) allowance is available via our cashless catering system. Each student eligible for FSM receives an allowance of **£3.05 per day**. Any unspent balance will automatically roll over to the following day. For example:

- If a child entitled to FSM is absent on Monday, their £3.05 allowance will roll over to Tuesday, giving them £6.10 available to spend on Tuesday.

- If a child entitled to FSM has £3.05 available but only spends £2.00, the remaining £1.05 will carry forward to the next day.

This means that students can build up a small balance during the week if they do not use their full allowance each day.

Please note that all FSM balances are reset each Friday. Any unused FSM allowance remaining at the end of the week will not roll over to Monday and cannot be carried forward into the following week.

If you have any questions about the FSM allowance or the cashless catering system, please contact reception who will be able to direct you to the appropriate person.

Changes to eligibility:

Starting September 2026, the UK government has significantly expanded Free School Meals (FSM) to all households receiving Universal Credit, regardless of their annual earned income. This major change removes the previous £7,400 income cap for Universal Credit recipients, extending free daily school lunches to an estimated 500,000 more children.

The most critical information and actions you need to take as a parent are detailed below:

The 3 types of school meals:

From September 2026, meals will be structured into three specific categories:

1. **Universal Infant Free School Meals:** This stays exactly the same. All children in Reception, Year 1, and Year 2 automatically get free meals. No application or proof of benefits is required.
2. **Expanded FSM (new):** For families on Universal Credit who earn *above* £7,400 a year. Your child is entitled to free school lunches but does not qualify for additional funding perks.
3. **Targeted FSM:** For families on Universal Credit who earn £7,400 *or less* a year or receive other qualifying legacy benefits. Children get free meals, plus additional support like Pupil Premium funding for their school, school travel assistance, and holiday club vouchers.

Crucial change – “Transitional protection” has now ended:

Since 2018, once a child qualified for free school meals, their spot was locked in safely even if their parents' income went up. **This protection officially ended on 31st August 2026.**

- Eligibility is now strictly based on your current financial circumstances.
- Local authorities and schools will now run mandatory annual rechecks every summer.
- If your income has risen and you no longer receive Universal Credit, your child may lose their free meal status for the new term.

What you need to do next:

1. **If you are currently on Universal Credit but your income was too high for FSM before:** Apply as soon as possible.

2. **If your child currently receives FSM:** Do not assume it will automatically roll over. Depending on where you live, your local authority will have either auto-verified your files over the summer holidays or prompted you to submit a renewal application.
3. **If you have a child starting Reception, Year 1, or Year 2:** You do not need to apply just to get the free lunch. However, if you are on a low income, it is highly recommended to fill out the [official Gov.uk FSM application](#) anyway. Registering unlocks vital extra funding (Pupil Premium) directly for your child's classroom.

PHSG Breakfast Club

To help everyone start the day feeling fuelled and ready to learn, our breakfast club will be available daily from 8:00am, offering a range of delicious breakfast options:

-  Warm, comforting porridge
-  Freshly toasted waffles
-  Pain au chocolate
-  Sausage rolls
-  Bacon rolls
-  A selection of cereals
-  Toast with a variety of toppings

Whether it's been a *"rushed out of the house without breakfast"* type of morning, or our students simply fancy a tasty start to their day with friends, breakfast club is a great way to get set up for success.

Eating breakfast can help improve concentration, memory and learning, as well as supporting a healthy lifestyle. By fuelling the body first thing in the morning, our students will be ready to make the most of every lesson.

Those entitled to **Free School Meals (FSM)** can purchase breakfast items using their daily allowance. Any breakfast purchased will come out of the £3.05 daily allowance, so students should make sure they leave enough credit for lunch items.

Layering up for online safety

Protecting children and mitigating risk at home doesn't just mean applying a filter and changing a few app settings, it needs a layered approach, and this is where Internet Matters 'Layering Up for Online Safety' comes in. This helps and guides you to set up devices safely across networks, the devices themselves, and the apps alongside regular conversations.

There is a [downloadable guide](#) which will show you how to *layer up* in a simple, manageable way. I do hope you find it helpful.

Potential dangers of AI

Artificial intelligence (AI) is being used to turn ordinary photos of children into sexual abuse material. The National Crime Agency and Internet Watch Foundation have issued new guidance to help parents make informed choices about sharing images of their children online. It covers reviewing privacy settings, revisiting consent with your child as they grow, and what to do if you're worried. The parent's guidance can be found here:

[AI Child Sexual Abuse Imagery: Parent Safety Guide](#)

Reading and literacy

A special welcome to all of our new students and their families to our regular section on reading. If you haven't heard about our reading initiatives yet, it's not too late to get involved, click on the link below to find out more.

[Plymouth High School for Girls - Reading & Literacy](#)

Don't forget to send in your "Extreme Reading" photos. We are eager to see the unusual and creative places where you've been enjoying a good book over the summer.

Competition time

The **PHSG Extreme Reading competition** is a fun reading initiative run by the Plymouth High School for Girls to help celebrate 2026 as the National year of Reading. Students **and their families** are challenged to submit photographs of themselves reading books in unusual, out-of-the-ordinary, or creative locations (e.g., on a trampoline, riding a horse, or standing up on a surfboard, upside down).

Please email your entries to Donna.Roughton@phsg.tsat.uk by the 30th September.

By entering you agree for the photo to be used on the school website



And remember our *26 in 26 Challenge*, where we're encouraging everyone to read 26 books in 2026. It's certainly not too late to get on board. Take a moment to think about everything you've read so far this year. You may be closer to your target than you realise.

Welcome to our monthly literacy spotlight!

Here we celebrate the birthdays of beloved authors and share their most famous works to inspire a love of reading at home.

“September is about society and social class!”

Celebrate an author who made us think about different positions in society and how we might try to work together.

Author	Birthdate	Birthplace	Famous work
Leo Tolstoy	9 th September 1828	Yasnaya Polyana, Russia	War and Peace, Anna Karenina
F. Scott Fitzgerald	24 th September 1896	St. Paul, Minnesota	The Great Gatsby
T.S. Eliot	26 th September 1888	St. Louis, Missouri	The Waste Land, Four Quartets
Miguel de Cervantes	29 th September 1547	Alcalá de Henares, Spain	Don Quixote

My Bookshelf – Spotlight on Mrs Heard, Librarian at PHSG

“Some of the first books I remember truly falling in love with were *The Enchanted Wood*, *The Magic Faraway Tree* and *The Folk of the Faraway Tree* by Enid Blyton. I adored the characters, the ever-changing worlds at the top of the tree, pop cakes and the slippery-slip. The books are still on my bookshelves – it was a joy to rediscover them years later while reading them to my own children.

Unsurprisingly, I’m drawn to library-themed books! *The Book Thief*, narrated by Death, is unforgettable for its reminder of the power of words to bring comfort and hope. *The Midnight Library* really gives you food for thought and explores regret but

also offers a message of hope and acceptance. Another favourite is *The Shadow of the Wind* by Carlos Ruiz Zafón, set in Barcelona among old bookshops and the Cemetery of Forgotten Books. It's part adventure, part mystery, part gothic horror. It's funny, romantic, and magical all at once. A 'must read.'

I also love historical fiction, particularly anything by Kristin Hannah, whose novels often centre on resilient women facing extraordinary circumstances and Khaled Hosseini- deeply moving storytelling.

At the other end of the spectrum, I have a soft spot for dystopian fiction. *1984* and *Brave New World* remain favourites for their unsettling questions about society and control. I also love *The Hunger Games* and all its spin offs.

Finally (difficult to stop if I'm honest!), a recommendation straight from our school library: anything by Sarah Crossan. *Where the Heart Should Be* is a verse novel set in Ireland during the Great Famine. This one really stayed with me. Heart- wrenching."



My message to parents and carers will land in your inbox at 3.30pm each Friday. My letters to you are also posted on the website [here](#) so you can easily refer back to them.

Finally, a reminder that your child's tutor is the first port of call for most things, so do reach out to them if you feel you need to.

Very best wishes,



Simon Underdown
Headteacher

Keep up to date with our latest news by clicking [here](#).

Dates for your diary:

Whole school

16 th October	Non-pupil day
19 th – 30 th October	Autumn half-term
2 nd November	Non-pupil day
3 rd November	All Years back to school

Year 10

23 rd September	Expectations evening
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Year 11

8 th & 15 th October	Year 11 parents' evening
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Year 12

9 th September	Expectations evening
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Year 13

23 rd September	Expectations evening
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