

17th January 2020

Dear Parents / Carers

I am writing to update you on the impact of some of the changes we introduced at the start of the academic year and to inform you about the next stage of our ongoing improvement.

Since September, we have been robustly enforcing expectations linked to basic school uniform, equipment and classroom standards. I am pleased to report that students and teachers tell me that it is having a significant impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The feedback is that learning is more focussed, better paced and with fewer disruptions. More importantly, the students say that they are happier and enjoy their learning far more. They also report that they are receiving better support.

The ban on mobile phones being used on the site has removed a major distraction for students and reduced the level of social media abuse. Where they are seen in use, including break times and lunch-times, they can be confiscated for the duration of the day. If a child needs to desperately contact home, including at the end of the school day, then they are able to do so from our school office or medical room. They can also do so once they have crossed the zebra crossing and are by the parent car park (next to the sports hall). These changes have given our pastoral teams the time to focus on supporting wider student welfare including mental health and attendance.

There are several forthcoming changes that I would also like to update parents about:

Homework

It goes without saying that students find it difficult to understand their lessons if they have not completed previous homework and consequently lack a firm grasp of the topics that they are learning. If your child needs somewhere quiet to work, the library remains open most days after-school until 4.30pm. Additionally, the canteen is open from 8am each morning and free breakfast is available.

From mid-February, we will be centralising our system for dealing with incomplete homework. Where students fail to complete set work by the agreed hand-in date, they will be expected to complete a same day after-school detention which will be led by senior staff. This will allow the students the necessary time to catch-up and promote work being completed in good time.

The new system will be phased in gradually for Year 7 and Year 8 and then extended to older students later in the year.

School Bags

An ongoing concern for us continues to be students arriving at school without school bags or with bags which are wholly inappropriate. It is important that students are able to carry their essential school equipment including stationery, exercise books and PE kit. Many of the boys currently have shoulder bags which are too small to carry much more than their pencil case and planner. Our girls sometimes arrive at school with hand bags which do not stand up to regular school use.

From September 2020 we will be introducing an Abbey branded rucksack as part of the school uniform which initially will only be compulsory for all Year 7 students. All other students will be expected to have a sturdy backpack for the next academic year with the expectation that all of Years 7 to 11 will have switched to the Abbey bags by Sept 2021 at the latest. We are working with our school uniform suppliers to reduce the uniform cost in other areas so that the addition of the bag does not create extra expense.

If your child is already arriving at school with a backpack then these changes will clearly not affect you for some time. However, I feel it is important to give sufficient notice to all members of our school community regarding these developments.

Lunch Times

We are in discussion with our catering firm about the possibility of implementing changes to school lunch which would reduce the flow of traffic through the school canteen at peak times. This might involve having separate lunch times for different Key Stages and we are likely to pilot a 'family style lunch' for all new Year 7s, joining from September. This essentially means students eating lunch in their form groups with supporting staff. In order to extend lunch for all students and maintain the same school day start and finish times (essential for those that travel by bus) it may be necessary to remove or reduce morning break times. That said, if we were to do so there would be no overall impact on the amount of recreation time that our students receive.

I will update parents with these decisions when they are made.

Term Dates

We are considering adjusting our school calendar from 2021/22 to include a two-week half-term in October. The benefit of this change would be two-fold: the Autumn Term is traditionally extremely long and very busy for teachers and students alike. A two week break would allow sufficient time for a rest halfway through this period and allow staff the necessary time to carry out assessment and planning activities needed at this point.

Secondly, it would allow members of the school community to book holidays at this less expensive off-peak period. At present, a small number of families book holidays that run in to the end of the summer term on grounds of cost. Whilst we cannot support parents removing their children for this purpose, we do recognise the issues associated with booking holidays and want to do something to mitigate this for families.

Although we will be proposing extending the half-term holiday we would adjust teaching at other points in the year to compensate. Many other secondary schools across the county have been following this model for a number of years and report a positive impact.

I believe it is inevitable that the incremental improvements already implemented and those proposed will be reflected in academic results in the longer term. I would like to personally thank all those parents that have written to me in support of the work of our staff. I do not always have the capacity to respond to every one individually but guarantee that all of your feedback is read and considered carefully.

Please can I finally ask that if you need to contact the school to see a member of staff, a meeting time will normally need to be arranged. Most staff, including Heads of Year and Subject Leaders, have busy teaching schedules but will happily get back to you promptly within 48 hours to respond to any issues or agree a meeting time. You can contact the school office or pastoral staff in the first instance.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Rowland Speller
Headteacher