

17th September 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: School Development Visit by Mr Barry Smith

We have decided to build upon the outstanding work that has been done over the last couple of years in the development of behaviour for learning at The Abbey School and, as you are aware, the improvements in our results and the atmosphere in school has been massive. However, we do not want to become complacent and are always keen to drive the school forward and want the best for our pupils. Therefore, the leadership team have made the decision to use the services of Mr Smith who has a proven track record of achieving fantastic results in developing the whole child in many schools, including some of the toughest in the country.

We have had a very exciting week in school and the vast majority of our children have responded wonderfully to the energy that the visit has brought.

We have been teaching our students the essential soft skills required for every child to become a good member of society, of their family and of their community; to be able to hold a conversation and to understand the importance of positive body language; to smile, to engage, and to greet others with confidence. These are all skills that will stand our students in good stead for their future learning and careers.

We want our students to aim high – even though we are a Kent high school there is no reason why our students cannot aspire to be as good, or better, than those who attend Grammar or independent schools, and to achieve similar results and to secure excellent jobs.

We are aware, however, that some of you have raised a variety of concerns and queries so we would like to address these individually:

Missing lessons for extra assemblies

We have held a number of additional assemblies this week, for all year groups, and these are just another inspirational example of showing our students a different way of learning. Yesterday, for example, our year 7s recited a poem together with passion and complete enjoyment, showing really positive collective learning; this was a complete joy to watch.

Safeguarding concerns

Safeguarding is always our first priority when anyone visits our school. We have through and robust procedures and a highly experienced, award-winning, DSL (Designated Safeguarding Lead), who has met Mr Smith and has escorted him around the site to witness his interaction with the children. In terms of any other safeguarding concerns you may have, Mr Smith came to us fully DBS checked, is accompanied around the site by staff, and has been recommended to us by both the Department for Education and the new Social Mobility Commissioner. Therefore, parents should be confident that any concerns are unfounded.

Prior notification – why were parents not informed?

We understand that parents feel they should have been notified of this visit, but this kind of support is a regular feature of any school's development; in fact, we have advisors, auditors and senior members of KCC or the DfE visiting us throughout any typical school year and this is considered not

only as good practice, but is also an operational matter which does not necessitate communication with stakeholders, parents or governors. On this occasion, however, as Mr Smith has spent some time interacting with our students and delivering assemblies, we agree that it may have been prudent to have advised our students of his visits and his methods.

Mr Smith's interaction with students

Mr Smith's methods may differ from those that our students are used to, but as a school that wishes to develop and progress we felt we should see what he has to offer. Some of his initiatives and strategies may be considered worth adopting or developing, some may be discarded; not all may be 'The Abbey Way' or will suit our ethos and values so we will reflect on this at the end of his visit.

Lunchtime concerns

Regarding the lunchtime for year 7s, their recreation space on the playground was reduced on one occasion as a trial to see whether it helped decrease the amount of incidents or potential bullying that can occur during unstructured time and we are unlikely to take this forward.

Children's wellbeing

The physical and mental wellbeing of our children has always been our priority and always will be. Sometimes students do not adapt well to change, or they take some time to adapt, and on occasion they may relay a different story to parents at home. We understand this but please be assured that we have spoken to a variety of students and the vast majority have enjoyed the excitement and dynamism that Mr Smith has demonstrated this week.

Staff are witnessing a change in our students - they are greeting us as they arrive at the gates with a smile, with a 'good morning miss/sir' – and contrary to concerns raised by a few parents, they are happy and confident young people.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those parents and members of the community who have taken the time to write to us with such supportive comments.

Yours sincerely



Dr R Speller
Headteacher