

6 February 2023

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to update you on the latest developments at Huish Episcopi Academy. Can I begin by saying a huge thank you for the level of support and encouragement that you, as a community, have offered us. School transformation is not easy but the willingness of the families we serve to work with us on the changes is making the work rapid and effective.

STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

I am pleased to report that corridors are now largely free of wandering students during lesson time – they are in lessons where they should be, learning their subjects. The lessons themselves have benefited greatly from the new, simple, “warn, move, remove” mechanism. Most lessons are free of disruption and we are able to concentrate on particular combinations of students and individuals that are not working well in a handful of lessons. Thank you to those parents who have highlighted particular ‘hot spots’ to us. **Every child is entitled to completely disruption-free learning at all times** – and we will continue to work to this high aspiration.

If students do make the mistake of repeatedly disrupting a lesson, they go to a new professional learning area called the Recovery Room, where they can continue their studies. This also allows the class they have left to continue with their learning free of disruption. By half term we will have had several rounds of teacher training on this system and we are achieving a good level of consistency. Our one-way system has also greatly reduced physical incidents during lesson changeover and break times. Our new canteen student traffic systems have allowed us to safely move more students through the canteen in a much shorter time. I know that despite the valiant efforts of our catering staff, the canteen and wet lunch arrangements are not sufficient for the number of students we have. Longer-term plans will need to include physical adaptations to make this better – thank you to those of you who have highlighted this to me. This priority will be made clear to the new Principal on appointment.

The vast majority of students have accepted the new, safer regime – and I thank you and them for this. As you will remember, in my previous letter I asked for your support regarding **defiance**. If a student is refusing to do what they are told or go where they are told, it’s very difficult indeed to manage them and also safeguard them. More often than not, repeated defiance results in a suspension; something we would always wish to avoid. A relatively trivial instruction becomes much more serious if young people refuse to follow it. Our new behaviour policy attaches a day in our Recovery Room to any suspension; increasing the deterrent and assisting our management of the student’s return to the Academy. I am pleased to report that the numbers of students engaging in this type of behaviour are now very low indeed. I would ask that you continue to support us with this by telling your children to follow instructions in the first instance, but raise questions and queries at the right time later – we will always listen to these.

Huish Episcopi Academy

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Registered in England and Wales: 7341553 Registered Office as above.

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NO HANDS ON

In response to incidents of physicality that were noticed during the OFSTED inspection and I also witnessed before Christmas, our behaviour policy cites “Putting hands on another student without permission” as a legitimate reason for a detention. The students know this as the ‘No Hands On’ rule and after half term we will sanction physical boisterousness with an after-school detention. Far too often we find out that what was ‘horseplay’ to one student was actually quite distressing to another; particularly if it takes place over time. This includes the snatching of ties. It does not, of course, include consensual hugs or holding hands between students, providing those involve mutual consent/willingness. Thank you for your support with this important safeguarding measure.

COMMUNICATION

Our electronic system that tracks all bullying, safeguarding and communication with home is now fully installed. I feel sure that many of you will have become aware that we are logging conversations and commitments from parents and staff in a much more systematic way - that prevents anything getting lost or forgotten. I still check every single entry personally and I am heavily involved in directing members of staff in the necessary course of action to take. However, I can see that there is already a greatly increased responsiveness from the Academy on issues that are often of great importance to parents and young people. I appreciate your patience as we embed the systems required to make this flawless.

BANTER

As we work through a range of issues that have been troubling young people it is clear that these have often started as ‘banter’ – what seems like relatively harmless teasing. Actually, one person’s banter can be another’s bullying. I find banter disrespectful and problematic amongst young people and I have told the students that it is not allowed. This has already raised their awareness of the potential harm that teasing and banter can cause, especially when it is directed at someone’s personal characteristics. Please do support me with this important message.

MOBILE PHONES

The new behaviour policy stipulates that the use of mobile phones and earphones are not allowed. The previous policy said something similar. There are very good reasons for this, mainly around safeguarding students and staff against inappropriate use including recording, videoing, photographing and using them to arrange unhelpful or unsafe activities. Most UK schools do not allow mobile phone use by students.

We know and understand that children have a mobile phone on them and, for some, this has become an essential tool to communicate with home. If a child needs to phone home they simply need to find any member of staff and ask them to oversee and supervise this. This simple measure ensures we can safeguard all children; particularly those in distress. I would ask that parents refrain from texting and phoning during the school day as this can place their child in a difficult position. If there is an urgent need to speak with your child, please phone the academy and explain and they will be brought to a phone to speak with you.

After half term we will be enforcing a strict: “See it, Hear it, Take it” policy with these items. If we see or hear a mobile phone or earphones being used, we will confiscate the item from the young person and return it at the end of the day. If this happens twice or more in a term, we will ask that a parent or guardian collects the item. Any confiscated item will be stored securely and confiscation will always take place in line with the [DfE Statutory Guidance on Searching, Screening and Confiscation](#). We are running a series of assemblies this week on this to make sure the students know and understand why this is in place. I would ask that you counsel your

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child about making sure any of these items are turned off and put away. As has always been the case, we cannot take responsibility for the loss or breakage of expensive items if brought into school.

The exception to "See it, hear it, take it" is when there is clear medical need; such as a diabetic young person who uses an app to monitor their blood sugar levels. I am working with our diabetic young people on a means of subtly alerting staff to this use of the phone so they can avoid confiscation and embarrassment.

HOMEWORK, SEND AND YEAR 11

Quite a number of parents and carers have been in touch to point out the inconsistencies in our homework strategy. We totally accept this and are planning to write in the next few weeks with an update on this important issue. Our new SENDCO, Mrs Horsford, is writing to parents today with an update on the SEND strategy. Mr Vaughan has written to parents regarding a number of extra opportunities for year 11 intervention including: form time Maths and English, lesson 6 intervention and Pearson Revise logins, as well as a second year 11 study skills evening.

PARENTS' EVENINGS

Please be advised that due to parental feedback at the recent open meetings, the date of the Year 7 Parents' Evening has been brought forward to Tuesday 28 February 4.30-7.30pm. The remaining dates, which we have not been able to change in the calendar, are as follows:

- Year 10 -Wednesday 22 February
- Year 12 - Tuesday 28 March

GOOD NEWS

Please be aware that good news and events are now mainly distributed through our Facebook and (soon to be launched) Twitter pages. They will, of course, feature on the Academy website as appropriate.

PROUD TABLE

We have been delighted to award quite a considerable number of awards for quality of work across a range of subjects through our 'Proud Table'. The feedback on this mechanism has been universally positive so we intend to develop the strategy further, alongside other praise and recognition measures, in the upcoming months. If your child receives Proud Table Recognition you will be informed through a postcard home from myself.

Thank you again for all your feedback and support as we move forward here at the Academy.

Yours sincerely,



Nat Parnell
Interim Principal