

## Parent Council News – Monday 24<sup>th</sup> September 2018

New members were welcomed and Alessandra Desbottes explained that the purpose of the council is for parents to act as a 'sounding board' on a range of issues identified by the school, which will help the school to reflect on what it currently does and how it may be improved. Additionally meetings give a range of parental opinions before new ideas or developments are implemented.

The first issue discussed was School transport for 6<sup>th</sup> form – a large number of bus passes were not available for start of term, despite county knowing about sixth form student numbers, low income and those out of catchment. The school finance office is being left to sort out a mess that has all the strings held by the County. There is still no clear information for sixth form students on the county website about what school transport is available.

The School Parliament and its election process were discussed. It was suggested that students' term of office should not be for every year but rather that it would be fairer to hold elections every year. This would allow a greater number of students the opportunity of participating. This has been taken back to the School Parliament and the SLT for discussion.

Mental health issues in children and also their friends' ability to support others working through mental health issues was raised. Suggestions were made about how the school could support children and these have been passed on to the relevant colleagues. Alessandra Desbottes pointed out that the fact remains, however, that schools are vastly underfunded. Whilst the wellbeing of our students is of paramount importance we lack the funding which would support greater invention. Some years ago the school employed a full time counsellor. Now, due to financial constraints, she works only one and a half days a week.

One parent raised the issue of 6<sup>th</sup> form pathways and asked if the school is now encouraging students to go down the apprenticeship route rather than the university route. Alessandra Desbottes explained that the school is unwavering in its approach that every student is treated individually and any advice given is tailored to their abilities, aspirations and hopes for the future. We remain an academic sixth form but understand that university is not the path that all students wish to follow. The sixth form team invite universities, employers and career experts to speak to students. They also organise visits to universities and companies which offer apprenticeships. Students are offered every available option and supported through the decision making process which ultimately must conclude with them making the right decision for them.

One parent asked if the assembly rota could be published on the school website. This has now been actioned.

A discussion was held on how best parents can support their children through GCSE exams. A GCSE revision preparation evening/study skills is held later in the year. It will be suggested that this be brought forward. Alessandra Desbottes informed parents that study skills and independent learning skills are understood to be of vital importance. The school plans to integrate these into learning from years 7 onwards so that students are more confident and less stressed when approaching GCSEs. Year 12 students who have skilfully navigated the exam process by starting early and not cramming revision into a short space of time will also be asked to share their good practice with year 11 students.

One parent said he would have expected his child to have more homework in Year 11. It was pointed out that we were only early on in the term and that there will be plenty of homework to follow. (Homework formed a large part of Parent Council discussions last year and it, along with teaching and learning, is the focus of the school's development plan). He also expressed his concerns about the length of school skirts. This and other uniform issues such as makeup were debated though one parent commented on her child's observation that the school was being very strict on uniform. The school's uniform policy is very clear. As in any school there will be some children who push the boundaries but the school works very hard to ensure that rules are followed. Regarding mobile phones the school has a no tolerance policy regarding the use of mobile phones during the school day. Where the rules are broken, sanctions are applied in line with the school behaviour policy.

Regarding lunchtime arrangements some parents felt that the price of items in the school canteen were not advertised clearly enough. This has been brought to the attention of the kitchen and will be improved.

The new report system was discussed. Some parents felt that the new format lacked the personal touch in earlier reports. Another said she would prefer teachers to put their energies into their teaching. Alessandra Desbottes explained that the purpose behind this change was to reduce teacher workload in line with DFE guidance. Teachers of subjects where students have only one lesson per week were previously writing in excess of 200 reports for each year group. Suggestion such as reintroducing individual targets will be discussed with the SLT.

The yellow sticker system was discussed whereby students who have a target grade of 9 can never achieve a 12 on yellow stickers because they can never be above target. SLT are aware of this and are working to redress this imperfection in the system. Regarding behaviour points for minor issues such as forgetting equipment and whether these should be communicated to parents the SLT feel that it would be

an overkill of information. Students are expected to learn from these minor infringements and to improve their organisational skills etc. Should a repeated pattern of behaviour be identified then, of course, this will be communicated to parents as are other more serious issues.