

21 May 2021

Dear parents and carers

It was my pleasure on Wednesday afternoon to meet (virtually) with a group of parents and carers of year 10 and 12 students for a focused parent and carer forum. We will be meeting with key stage three parents and carers next week, and will continue to offer the opportunity of forum meetings into next year.

Whilst some of the questions were specific to year 10 and 12, there were some more general questions so we felt it would be beneficial to share the notes from the meeting with the broader school community. The notes are arranged by the topics we covered.

Online parent and carers consultation evenings

During COVID restrictions, we increased the number of reports sent home and offered the opportunity for parents and carers to speak to teachers, either by phone or a Teams meeting. However, following feedback from parents and carers, we may have not communicated this as clearly as we thought. Please do contact your child's subject teacher or head of year if you have any anything you wish to discuss.

The school confirmed we are looking at options around consultation evenings moving forward, and will be asking staff, parents and carers for their views on whether we should return to traditional consultation evenings in the school hall, or invest in an online system. We did, however, confirm that consultation evenings will be part of the calendar for next year.

Exams

We do not yet know what changes (if any) will be made to the assessments for students currently in year 10 and 12. As soon as we know, we will of course share this information. We know that exams are being discussed at the moment and content is being looked at, but there are no definitive answers and we are awaiting information from JCQ.

Following a question regarding the exams in June for Year 10, these are not classed as mock exams as such. Mock exams provide the opportunity for students to experience sitting an exam in a formal setting and to assess where they are. Whilst we will be able to accurately gauge student progress from these assessments, they will not offer the opportunity for students to experience examinations in the larger exam rooms. We will ensure that all students have this opportunity in advance of their actual examinations next summer, whether this is in a formal mock or in a more informal walking/talking mock opportunity.

Preparation for the end of year assessments is happening in their classes, with departments carefully planning lessons in the run up to assessments. Students also have access to GCSE Pod which they can use at home.

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Predicted grades for A levels are looked at early in the academic year. If progress is continued and there are no issues, teachers will use their professional judgement to grade. Cautious optimism is applied to any borderline students.

Trips

We are hoping to be able to run trips next year and are starting to look at planning for this. Currently a number of venues are not accepting the size of groups we would be sending which is limiting opportunities in this academic year but we will explore all opportunities. Our focus is on ensuring a full range of trips are offered from September. All being well we are hoping that sports day will take place in July as planned. Trustees are fully behind looking at the opportunities and trips available next year.

Masks

All restrictions hinge on the current government road map. Students are no longer required to wear masks in school whilst staff continue to wear them in communal areas and corridors. We will wait for an update on this at the June press conference.

Clubs

Following questions regarding clubs at Tonbridge and Sevenoaks, we guarantee that students receive the same opportunities at both sites. The only differences in the clubs list are due to there being no KS5 at Sevenoaks. There are complications putting together a plan for both sites, if we have a teacher who can offer a club at one site, we do need to ensure this is offered at the other site, which is not always possible. In this case the club would not run at either site for fairness. We are currently working on next year's timetable and before any clubs can be planned, we first need to know where staff are going to be on a daily basis next year.

Regarding sports for the sixth form, this is not compulsory and we would not move to make it compulsory, since we also take into account the views of the students themselves. However, there are a number of opportunities available to the sixth form and we will continue with this for those who want to participate and ensure they are all aware of the available opportunities.

Sevenoaks sixth form

The same A level subjects will be offered across the school in year 11 regardless of site. Year 11 will start looking at their choices towards the end of Term 1 this autumn. These are not set in stone and we work with our students to ensure they are choosing the right subjects. They need an average score of 5.5 across their best 8 GCSE grades and subjects, including maths and English. Each subject has individual criteria (these can be found on our website). Students can study more than 3 A levels, although we do not recommend this. It is far better to excel in three A levels, rather than spread yourself too thinly across four. University entrance criteria are based on three A level grades.

Building work for the sixth form space at Sevenoaks is currently taking place and should be finished halfway through next year. They will have the same opportunities as students at Tonbridge with a study area and a social space, although this will look slightly different due to the building space. We are looking forward to sharing images of these in the new academic year.

Report grades and timing

Reports for Years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12 are coming out at the end of the year, 2 days before the end of term. Unfortunately, there is not the flexibility to move assessments and marking, which

has a direct impact on when these reports can be produced. Teachers are undertaking the huge task of assessing for students in Years 11 and 13, which requires a lot of evidence and work. Therefore, they have not had the flexibility to start assessments for any other groups yet. They will have 2 weeks to mark and produce end of year grades and write report. The report will detail how to get in touch with the school should you have any questions.

Staff turnover

It is usual for staff to leave in-year due to a number of different reasons. We have not seen greater staff movement this year, but there have been maternity leave covers in place and some changes to staffing locations as a result of this. We have also had a member of staff who moved away to be nearer family following the impact of COVID, which is disappointing but understandable given the global impact of the pandemic.

Teaching staff punctuality to lessons

Due to students staying in their bubbles in set areas, teachers have had to move around the school more this year than usual. Unfortunately, on some occasions, this can have a knock-on effect on them arriving on time for their next lesson. At the end of lessons, staff often take the opportunity to have a private catch up or a quick word with students before moving on to the next class. This can be to arrange a follow up session on a particular topic, to challenge a behaviour from the lesson or to check on the welfare of a child in the class. When staff are teaching from their departmental base, this has no impact on the start of the next lesson as they do not then need to collect their resources and computer and move across the school. We are planning to return to a more traditional use of the school spaces next year, so do not expect this to be an ongoing issue. We would like to thank students, parents and carers for their forbearance and understanding in the meantime.

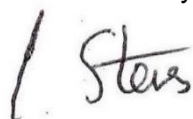
Communications

We have not been producing a weekly bulletin due to there being little to share with parents and carers regarding clubs or trips, as these haven't been able to take place. Regular updates have been shared by way of the Headteacher's Update. We are intending to return to a regular weekly bulletin in September. Trustees are also looking at sharing more information with the parents and carers. We have taken onboard feedback on how other schools have been communicating with parents and carers and are looking at managing our communications, to build on what we would like to keep and you would like to see. Once trips and clubs start to take place again, there will be more information to share with you.

I would like to thank all those who attended and sent in questions. As a trustee of the school having this regular link with the parent and carer body is really important, and something the trustee board value.

If you have any questions or queries in relation to the notes from this meeting, please contact school@wealdgs.org.

Yours sincerely,



Ms L Stevens
Co Vice-Chair of Trustees