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25th October 2024

Dear Parent/Carer,

Parental Update 8

And so, the first half term of 2024/25 comes to an end. It has felt both long (8 weeks) but also it has passed so quickly. It has been great to finish it on a high with a wonderful Year 11 Parents' Evening last night and an inspirational visit from the Lasallian Brother Superior General (the worldwide boss) yesterday. This was on top of a week that included, formation for staff and students, National Porridge Day fundraising by our 1719 Society students, flu vaccinations, Year 11 rewards trip to Alton Towers, a wealth of sporting practises and fixtures and a Governors' Personnel Committee.

Ahead we have a week for staff and students to recharge their batteries (unless they are also parents!) before we return for an equally busy second half term running up to Christmas. I hope that, however you spend it, next week is time of enjoyment and fulfilment for you and your family.

Whole School Focus – Toilets

This is a tabloid favourite with regular stories around schools having draconian rules and denying students basic human rights and, understandably, people not involved in schools, thinking it unkind or uncaring for schools to have restrictions on toilet use.

I think it is important to be open and upfront with parents about the challenges we, like many other schools, have with students accessing the toilets. I also think it is important, that we are clear that at no point, ever, do we want to prevent a child, in real need, of accessing the toilets – that applies here, along with almost every other school I know.

However, the reality is that toilets can be the most unregulated spaces in a school. Before we had restrictions, the following could be a daily issue:

- Gatherings of 30 to 40 students in the toilet areas but not using the cubicles
- Up to 6 or 7 students in one cubicle whilst the other cubicles were not being used,
- Vaping or smoking taking place
- Damage and litter / blocking of toilets
- Students truanting alone or in groups
- Students coming down most, if not all lessons to sit in there
- Students arranging to meet up

These are not safe behaviours and the toilets didn't feel like somewhere that our younger students would feel safe to enter – something that they regularly told us, with some students saying they wouldn't go to the toilets in school – obviously that is not something any of us want.

So last year, to address the problems we were facing and to ensure students felt safer, we changed our approach and allowed students full access before and after school and then allocated blocks to different age groups at break and lunchtime. At other times i.e. lessons and lesson changeovers, toilets were not open to students unless they had a toilet pass (based on a medical need) or were genuinely in need of the toilet – in which case the teacher could give them a note. This has worked well over the past 6 months.

To facilitate this, however, requires a high level of staffing at the toilet entrances and, on occasions, staff are held up or unable to be there. When this happened, then very quickly, the problems I mentioned in the bullet points above, immediately start to happen again. This again becomes a safeguarding issue for us.

You can perform miracles by touching the hearts of those entrusted to your care.