Letter to parents and carers

29 October 2020

We’re well into half term already and I hope it is proving an enjoyable if not rather wet week.

With the first half of term complete, we have had an opportunity to reflect on how the changes we have made across the school due the pandemic are working. Attendance has been very good, and our students have embraced the idea of bubbles and taken the risks of Covid-19 very seriously. Whilst we have had positive cases of the virus within the school community the resulting self-isolation and home learning has worked well.

We have been working very hard to ensure we are keeping all our students safe, and we have also been reviewing what is happening in secondary schools up and down the country. The Government and Public Health England established guidelines for us before term started, and we were given autonomy in how we implemented them. We opted for having five year group bubbles and defined school zones that have kept those bubbles separate. Teachers have moved between zones and students have been restricted to their defined set of classrooms – which means we have been unable to utilise our specialist classrooms for their original purpose. Several secondary schools in Devon operate the same system.

However many other schools, both in Devon and across the country, opted for a different system which uses bubbles and a one way system rather than zones. Within this structure students move around the school in a one way system, that keeps them within bubbles and the teachers in their specialist areas.

We have conducted a full review of our risk assessment as well as speaking in detail to our staff about how it’s going. The result is that we have recommended changes to how we operate bubbles in regard to the pandemic. The changes meet the guidelines set down by PHE in every regard. The updated risk assessment will be shared with Governors and submitted to Devon County Council prior to any changes taking place.

Next week we will inform you of the changes we’re making in more detail, with a view to implementing them on Monday 9th November. Please rest assured that any changes we make are in the best interests of our students.

The concept of establishing zones, as we did, was seen back in August as the strictest implementation of social distancing within schools. On balance both systems seem to combat the spread of Coronavirus well, and if anything the one way system may have marginally better statistics on positive cases.

But we can also see other positive aspects about the one way system that we believe would improve student and teacher safety, welfare and learning outcomes.

The second half of term will begin as usual on Monday 2nd November, and there will be NO changes for the first week to how we work. Later that week we will provide you and our students with full details of the changes they can expect to see from 9th November, which will not affect drop-offs but will see some changes within school.

We are looking forward to welcoming everyone back into school on Monday.

Mrs Crook