

Our Ref: BSN/KON

October 2014

ALL PARENTS

Dear Parent/Carer

The first half-term has gone by in the blink of an eye. It has been as action packed as ever with much for our school to feel proud about and reflect on. Perhaps the biggest event in the school happens when the pupils are not even at school. The penultimate Thursday in August is a huge day for every secondary school in the country. This year it was even more significant because of changes that the Government has made to the exam system. In previous years schools could enter pupils on multiple occasions for exams, vocational exams could count for up to 6 GCSEs and English had the speaking and listening element counted as part of the final grade. All of this changed this summer. Many of these changes happened in the middle of the year making it very difficult for schools to adapt their approaches. Broadly speaking, I support all these changes (if not the timing). I believe that schools should be concentrating on improving teaching and learning rather than trying to find a strategy to maximise their results. The only real improvement for pupils occurs in the classroom.

There was some good news in the results we achieved this year. Our English, Maths and Science were all school records. English was much improved, with a significant uplift despite results falling across the country, and Science easily beat the national averages. We are lucky to have an excellent Modern Foreign Languages department who gained great results. The majority of departments saw improvements on the previous year. However, we still have much to do if we are to achieve our aim of being the best school in the area. We have learnt some valuable lessons and will apply them this year to ensure that the current Year 11 perform even better.

At the end of the last academic year I wrote to ask you for your support with uniform. I have to say that it is much improved this year so thank you for your help. The school's rules have not changed since I became Head Teacher. The only difference is that now we enforce them. As we go through the year I will start a consultation on uniform. I am not comfortable with pupils' footwear (although I appreciate they probably are!). I also know that some pupils and parents are keen on blazers. I think that it is important that we consider our options.

Over the summer there were some very significant changes to the school. Perhaps the most visible change has been the investment in new facilities. The Governors agreed to spend almost £500,000 on improving the site. The consensus of all our visitors so far has been that it has been very well spent. One Governor commented that he believed that it showed the pupils that we cared (and we really do) and that we were instilling pride in the pupils. On Open Evening, the prospective parents could not believe the transformation. The school is not a business, we are not looking to make a profit so any available funds will always be invested in our pupils while I am Head Teacher.

As you know we have made big changes to the school's timetable and curriculum. The rationale was to support the school's aim of increasing the challenge that each child faces in their lessons. Pupils now study more English and Maths and most pupils will study two rather than one language.

Perhaps the most significant changes have happened within individual subjects where pupils are being taught at a much higher level than was previously the case. We are very keen that each child makes more progress at Key Stage 3 than they used to. An example of this was Year 9 last year where, on average, pupils made more progress in one year than they had in the previous two combined years in every subject. We must ensure that we continue this by teaching the right knowledge and skills to allow every pupil to enjoy outstanding learning.

The last thing that I want to write to you about is something that does not occur in school. I am not on Facebook or Twitter mainly because I do not understand it, or its appeal. However, I am very well aware that I am in a minority because most pupils and many parents do partake. Recently, I was talking to the Police about issues in Sedgley. At present their number one concern was issues surrounding Social Media. Unfortunately, this is becoming increasingly the case in school. My staff have spent far too much time trying to get to the bottom of these types of issues. It seems that people are prepared to say things in the virtual world that they would not dream of saying in real life. The impact in school is that children are upset and feel unable to learn. I would encourage all parents/carers to keep a close eye on what their child is doing and saying online. Incredibly, in some cases parents/carers are actually getting involved themselves. Potentially, there could be very serious consequences that might have a life changing impact. I am sure nobody would want to see that.

As always I thank you for your continuing support.

Yours sincerely

Ben Stitchman
Head Teacher