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22nd August 2024

Hello,

I hope the return to school days has gone smoothly in your household. Thank you for your support of the school's dress code this week- standards have been very high and already there is a better feeling of community in the school.

I hope that the updates and reminders below are useful to you and your child.

1) Mobile phones

Starting with the main headline in last weekend's papers I'd like to outline our approach to the Scottish Government expectation that we address the negative impact of phones on learning. The guidance supports me to take whatever action necessary to achieve this- up to and including a full ban on phones inside the school grounds from 8.40-3.40.

Let me firstly reassure you that there is no suggestion in the guidance of Head-Teachers banning children from having a phone during their journey to and from school to communicate with you as required- nor would I want to do so even if it was an option.

Secondly, the final decision will be taken after discussion with Pupil Council, Parent Council and staff and will be based solely on what we need to do to protect learning and wellbeing. Reassure your child that keeping phones off and away in class and during lesson time in the corridor in the coming weeks will go a long way towards removing the need for a total ban.

2) Toilets

The second issue I need to discuss is to do with slight changes we are making next Monday vis-à-vis the use of the toilets. In light of last session, we have decided to make some changes to the configuration of the toilets to make them more hygienic, to make it less appealing for pupils to hide out in them and to remove the fear that caused many pupils to avoid the toilets last session- and even this week.

With effect from next Monday, the two toilets in the PE corridor will become one S4-6 male toilet and one S4-6 female toilet. The two toilets in the science corridor will become S1-3 male and S1-3 female. The Unisex toilets upstairs will become one S1-3 unisex toilet and one S4-6 unisex toilet. Furthermore, the unisex toilets will be closed during class time to allow Dr Miller, Mrs Lockley and Dr Ross's classes to get on with their learning. Pupils are expected to respect this and anyone not doing so can expect a clear sanction.

We believe these actions will improve the situation for pupils and will gather pupil views in the second term back on whether these changes have helped.

Those are the two updates, what follows now are reminders of school's expectations which would appreciate it if you would reinforce with your young person should they not wish to support these standards.

Attendance and Timekeeping

We changed the shape of the school day to remove any confusion about when learning starts- **the first full lesson starts at 8.40 and it is essential that pupils are at the door of the classroom by that time for 2 reasons.**

Firstly, because all lessons have a structure to them and what happens in the first five minutes is crucial to successful learning. There will often be a starter activity that reminds you of what was learned in the previous lesson or of key information you will need to recall for this lesson. There will be learning intentions which explain what the teacher wants you to know, understand and be able to do by the end of the lesson- this helps you focus on and process the things you are learning. There will also be success criteria which not surprisingly describe what successful learning looks like. If you miss this, then the lesson will be much harder to follow and crucially the learning much harder to achieve. You are also disrupting teaching and distracting pupils who have settled well.

Secondly- it is a life skill. Employers will not tolerate you not being there when they need you and if we give you any sense that lateness is okay or even that it is not a problem, we are not helping you get ready for work and life after school.

I hope these two reasons make sense- we want you to succeed in your learning and succeed in your life. Between lessons you need to move swiftly to your next class for exactly the same reason. Teachers need you to go straight to class and request permission to go to the toilet at a suitable point in the learning rather than miss the start which as I hope I've explained it is all structured to allow you success.

If AT ALL POSSIBLE, we want you in school, every day. Why? **Firstly, because attendance matters.** Once attendance starts to drop so does the likelihood of success. One lengthy block of time off due to genuine ill health can always be recovered but regular missing of individual classes has a demonstrated effect on the success of a young learner. When your attendance is below 80% then your Guidance teacher will be in touch with your family to look for solutions but I would want it not to get anywhere near that level. Here's a simple illustration: 90% attendance sounds good but even 90% attendance would mean that by the end of S5 you have missed half a year of school.

Secondly, almost every reference we write asks the question "are they reliable?". What this means is if they gave them a job, an apprenticeship or a place on this course are you going to turn up often enough to do it justice. Your attendance rate and number of lates is the key to answering this and it has been very helpful or very damaging to your prospects. We can't lie so please help us help you by getting here every possible day.

I'd also like to make another request to help us **keep the school grounds safe** by asking that parents do not come into the school grounds at the start or end of day. At start of day, we would strongly prefer it if you would drop your pupil outside the school- it will be a lot quicker for you than getting caught in the 5 mph circuit round the car-park. For the record, I don't underestimate the task in trying to get a teenager into the car five minutes earlier in the morning so that they have time to walk the last 200 yards but I would very much appreciate it if you would try.

At the end of the day we have the same request. Previously janitors stood at the gates and would not let parents in at the end of the school day but this is no longer one of their duties and they have other end of school responsibilities. I have no means to legally enforce it but I am once again strongly requesting that

parents not come into school between 3.25 and 3.55pm- we do have 1100 pupils all funnelling out the front gates, buses trying to get in and out, staff trying to get in and others trying to get out as well. If your pupil needs collected, could you meet them down Keppoch Road or by arriving in school after 3.55pm to collect them please? An exemption is in place based on short- or long-term medical conditions; please contact Guidance if you think this should apply to your child.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Vance". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'J' and a clear 'Vance'.

Dr J Vance
Rector