



Friday 8 October 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I wish to start with my thanks to the many hundreds of students who supported our open evening last night. We had approximately 750 visitors throughout the evening and although it was more stage managed and marshalled than normal, it enabled new children and families to meet our students and staff, and see the school 'in person'. Thank you.

Meet the Tutor Evening – Monday 18 October 2021

Please look out for the emailed invitations to this online event with your son or daughter's tutor.

COVID Update

We have been grateful that this week did not result in a spike in cases amongst students or staff. Whilst this is great news, there is the risk that it contributes to a degree of complacency and ignores the risk of the unknown asymptomatic cases. For this reason, I wish to draw attention to several matters:

- (1) Please continue lateral flow testing every Wednesday and Sunday. There is no doubt that the test detects COVID-19 and therefore can then lead to the confirmatory PCR test.
- (2) Face coverings on all school buses remain highly recommended. Our own spot checks and conversations with bus drivers reveal that far too many students no longer wear their face covering unless an adult is present or reminds them to do so. Please discuss this with your children if they use a school bus.
- (3) The school will be hosting the vaccination programmes next Wednesday. I understand all families have received their invitations and requests for consent.

A number of local secondary schools have already completed their vaccination programme. I understand that small groups of protestors have gathered outside some schools on the morning of those vaccinations. We understand those groups oppose the vaccination of 12-15 year olds, and have peacefully and lawfully protested against the national programme. We do not have concerns for your children's safety as a result of any such protest, but suggest this is something you might also mention and talk about with your children so that they are not uncomfortable. Naturally, the presence of pastoral and senior staff will continue to be very high on the school gates at the start and end of the day.

Continued...

Student Voice

Just like all parents, carers and staff, all students across all of the RLT schools took part in a survey in July. Students were presented with 17 statements that invited strongly agree to strongly disagree responses.

Much like the parent survey, students' overall responses were very favourable. For example, over two thirds (and in some case three quarters) of all students strongly agreed or agreed: that they were satisfied with life at CNS; that teachers help them to do their best; that they are given challenging work; they are encouraged to read; they have people they can talk to at CNS; they are encouraged to be physically and emotionally aware and safe; that they are encouraged to respect others; or that they would recommend the school to others. In fact, our most positive response was 84% of students strongly agreeing or agreeing that they felt safe when they were at school. This was higher than the secondary school average but...

This also meant that 16% of those students who took part did not agree. In fact, 11% were unsure, 1% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed. That is a lot of young people in a school of almost 1000. Our next job is not to pat everyone on the back about the 84%; it is to be curious and focused on the 16%.

How we do that is complicated. When we drill down and look at students' responses to any of the statements, we can see significant differences between year groups. For example, students (here and elsewhere) reported feeling safer as they get older. *Why is this? Are we sure we know?*

And so, the survey is merely a starting point. Something that helps identify several areas of interest that we shall remain focussed on throughout the year. Those areas of interest are:

1. How well students feel their teachers explain how to learn, remain organised and remember;
2. How well the school encourages them to look after their emotional and mental health;
3. How well the school encourages them to respect people from other backgrounds and treat people, equally;
4. How well the school responds to incidents of bullying and / or harassment.

What are we going to do next?

There are several new elements within our plans for student voice this year:

- Approximately one in six students will be invited to take part in a more detailed and regular 20-minute conversation - on Monday, students will be able to volunteer to participate if they wish. All will be asked about their experiences in school as part of a small group (of five) and the same group will meet the same member of staff towards the end of each one of our half terms. We will make sure that those groups are comfortable with the other members and often it will be their friends. Staff who will be leading each group will be approaching students in the next week to gain their permission and then make arrangements for the first meeting. This is an incredibly ambitious programme with the potential for enormous benefits for our school.
- All students will complete the full survey in July, but also in the New Year. This will give us a mid-year perspective and find out if certain areas have slipped or if others have improved. Again, feeding into our plans for improvement.
- We will be introducing end of unit student feedback routines, so that teachers can refine the curriculum in light of more detailed student feedback.

Student Conduct

Student voice links perfectly to student conduct. For example, if your child is one of those that was unsure or disagreed that they felt safe at school then it is almost certain that the changes they need to experience this year must result from a change in the behaviour of other students.

Empathy is what makes us all human, but it is a quality or gift that has to be nurtured and grown over time. Punishments, or the threat of punishments, often do little to truly change the way we behave. As parents and in schools, we know our focus has to be on helping a young person understand how their behaviour makes others feel – and then help them learn how to ‘own’ both the intentional and unintentional effects on other people. It is not good enough for any of us to say in our defence, “I didn’t *mean* to upset you.”

We know that student disruption of lessons is very rare at CNS. Where poor behaviour and attitudes are most likely to be displayed are when there is little or no staff or adult supervision. This means that your children are more likely to feel unsafe or unhappy at lunchtime (if they do not use one of our supervised areas), on a school bus, or when they are online.

Our work on student conduct is in that phase of encouraging students to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do and not because they fear the consequences of wrongdoing. *How do we encourage our children to choose high standards of behaviour in both public and private?*

We talk about personality being who we are in public and character being who we are in private, when no one is looking - or if we do not believe we shall be caught. This is a simple way in which young people can think about right and wrong.

School buses are a very good example of this issue. Whilst the vast majority of our students, your children, are well behaved on the school buses, if you ask your children they will tell you it is also the place where students might be the ‘least best version’ of themselves that day. We know that if no one is looking, students are less likely to wear their seatbelt or stand up whilst the bus is moving, more likely to use poor language, or to behave in a way they know is completely unacceptable.

Encouraging students to report such behaviour, or asking the drivers for CCTV imagery is helpful and we act on this when we have the opportunity. This is a good short-term solution but we have to be equally determined to educate our young people to choose to do the right thing – not because they might be punished, but because they choose to follow the right path.

In terms of student conduct, our goal in the coming years is to draw more and more attention towards students’ grasp of any gaps between their supervised and unsupervised conduct. This is old-fashioned character-building stuff, but also a huge emphasis on empathy and asking, “What is it like to be on the receiving end of me?”

With that uncomfortable question now firmly at the forefront of *my* mind, I shall end here for this week with the hope that I have held your attention and shone a light on both our ambition and the climb ahead.

Have a lovely weekend.

Yours faithfully



Barry Doherty, Headteacher