



17 September 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

I can hardly believe that students have only been in school for 8 days, and in the case of Years 10 and 11, 5 days. I am conscious that it is going to be hard for me to convey just how much has changed, for the better, for our students in this time but I hope you will bear with me while I try.

Of course, we have experienced a small amount of choppy water with a very small minority of students and families who feel strongly that they do not agree with our uniform policy and are, therefore, not willing to abide by it. It was never going to be easy to change that embedded mindset of 'we have a rule but we don't need to stick to it'. The reality is that within any large organisation it is not for the individual to pick and choose which of those rules are acceptable to them. If we are to truly give our students what they deserve: classrooms free from low level disruption where they can feel safe and inspired and genuinely connect with the awe and wonder of the subject they are learning, then we do need to have a code of conduct that we really do follow.

For too long students at John Smeaton Academy have been unclear about what the rules are. There have been rules but they were frequently abandoned. This is now not the case. Students know where they stand and the vast majority are thriving as a result: students are gaining stamps, credits and their first certificates! They are looking forward to their Positive Discipline Reward trip on Friday 1 October where they will get to enjoy their choice of experience at either Alton Towers, Chester Zoo or bowling and the cinema. They have been captivated and excited by yesterday's announcement of the 100% Attendance Club which as it stands this morning (providing they attend school today) they are all still on track to be a part of when it launches with its first huge event after half term. Trust me when I say students will be thrilled by what we have in store for them! They were delighted to see their academy chosen to host Channel 4's live news event on Tuesday 14 September and proud of the exceptional manner in which their fellow students who represented them came across. But do you know what the most moving part of this week has been for me? The Positive Discipline lesson on Wednesday 15 September when I had an opportunity to issue 'Principal's Praise' and spend 1:1 time hearing how students were really feeling. As a mother myself I had to work hard to hold back my emotions upon hearing unprompted, time after time after time, from every student that has experienced school at John Smeaton last year, that their school had changed for the better, that they now feel safe, that they can now learn because their lessons are not being ruined by disruptive students and that their confidence has grown. My goodness, your children are articulate! What came across so incredibly powerfully was that they have been longing for this. They have wanted to feel this way and have felt frustrated that they have been unable to be truly happy at school. Now they are able to flourish and to enjoy their lessons and they are excited for the launch of Enrichment++ time.

Our Year 7 cohort have, of course, not experienced the academy any other way and they are so inspiring as a group. There are 97 of them currently but we are getting regular enquiries from families who have heard that John Smeaton has, this time, *really* changed for the better. And you can put your trust in us. We have weathered many a storm regarding our approach to 'holding

the line' but we know it is essential if we are to ensure the words we say and the messages we give about working in partnership with students and their families to 'Secure the Gift of Choice' are not just words but are a reality. It is no surprise to me that our teachers are having to plan far more than they ever have had to before because more learning is taking place! For the first time they can plan their personalised, high quality lessons and actually deliver them, sharing their passion for their subject. This is because school is now a purposeful and enjoyable place where students can take ownership and self-regulate their behaviour. And the vast majority of students have demonstrated beyond all doubt that they want their academy to be like this.

So, to those that still feel aggrieved by our approach to staying true to the rules, please understand that we cannot and will not deviate from our consistent approach; we would be failing our students if we do and I cannot let down our young people and their families who have experienced such positivity in the last two weeks. I have a responsibility to fulfil my promise to them: that I will provide an outstanding educational offer for our students and as an experienced Principal and Executive Principal I know what it takes to truly deliver this. This moral imperative is one that is also keenly felt throughout The GORSE Academies Trust; indeed, the Executive Team is now based at John Smeaton Academy bringing welcome stability.

As I conclude I would just like to take a moment to thank everyone who has supported us in bringing about the rapid transformation of the academy. It has been far from easy but the rewards have been rich: whether you are a parent/carer or an adult connected to fulfilling the educational aims of the academy, we are all united in wanting the best for our students and their present and future is now much brighter as a result of the collective hard work and partnership that we have established.

I hope you have an enjoyable weekend and I am looking forward to continuing this remarkable journey next week.

Yours faithfully



Mrs L Griffiths
Principal