

21 February 2017

Dear Parent/Carer

### February half-term newsletter

I trust you and your family are well. I write as the new half-term begins, and I must confess to wondering where the time this academic year has gone! The feel of the academy during lessons and at other times continues to be outstanding. We recently had Claudia Harris, the CEO of the Careers & Enterprise Company, visit with our own CEO Martyn Oliver. This was to discuss the progress being made with our employer engagement project involving Years 9 and 10, who have been completing bespoke profiling software, and have then been invited to meet employers in career areas that might interest them. The feedback from Claudia, as she visited lessons and met with students to discuss the project, was exceptional. I have also been showing candidates around for various positions as the academy grows in size, and they too have commented on how studious, focused and hardworking students are, and how friendly and polite too. Year 11 and Year 10 are on with their revision, having prepared well (in the main!) for Mock Exams, ahead of their actual GCSEs in the Summer. Their conduct was a real credit. It is such a pleasure to work with your sons and daughters at the academy.

I wanted to draw your attention to the following:

#### Parents' Evening - Thursday

The second parents' evening of the year is this week, on Thursday 23 February 5-7pm. You will be aware of this via the Praising Stars© 3 report that your child received before the half-term break. Students should be actively making appointments, at your request, with their teachers. The primary focus is for students who are off target by some margin, or who are not putting enough effort in, but also students approaching GCSE examinations in Year 11 and Year 10. The Planner page 177 is where students would be recording appointment times. It is important that appointments are made in advance, rather than attempting to 'slot in' as this then puts all appointments out, and frustrates everyone.

#### Changes to Break/VMG arrangements

From Monday 27 February we will be altering the break and VMG tutor time arrangements. Instead of having all students on break at the same time, following on from their VMG, this period of time will now be 'split'. During the first half of 10.25 to 11.00am, two VMG continents will be on break, whilst the other two VMG continents will be on tutor time/assembly. At 10.40am students swap, so by 11.00am everyone has had a break and a VMG session, with some change-over time built in. These arrangements are generally put in place in Outwood academies within the first year, however I had delayed the decision as we were generally coping at break-times. As you may be aware however, the academy is growing rapidly with many mid-term admissions, and we have over 60 more first choice applications into the new Year 7. Students have been approaching me, concerned that it is proving harder to get served food at break-times due to very long queues, and many are put off from even trying. It is simply not possible to serve everyone in the current 15 minutes, and toilet queues are also something students (and parents) are discussing with me. By splitting break/VMG, the dining hall, which is really just a corridor intersection as you know, will be much less crowded, particularly when it is too wet/windy to go outside, and many more will be able to have a snack. We have been working with Carillion, our PFI caterers, to put on a much larger selection at break-times, which will start shortly. The new arrangements were explained to students before half-term via assemblies, and have also been discussed during VMG.

#### Lunchtime Expectations

I continue to be very pleased with the calm, friendly and orderly atmosphere during our staggered lunchtimes. You may recall we were able to negotiate the purchase of additional tables with the PFI owners last year, to

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ensure students generally can sit, eat and chat with their friends for the whole of lunchtime should they wish. Students are always served within seven minutes, and have plenty of time to then socialize, without being coaxed outside after eating, to make space for others. This is a far cry from before my time, when the whole school tried to eat within a 50 minute window! Recently, to improve the situation further, we have asked students, once they have eaten, not to stand and crowd around others who are still eating. We ask them to remain seated, or, should they want to stand and chat, to go outside. This makes it more pleasant for students who are still eating, who then don't have elbows accidentally knocked by those standing behind them. We explained this during a series of assemblies before half-term, and students understand repeated requests to comply will result in a C4. Students have responded well to these changes, which I appreciate. As we continue to grow, this tweak to the arrangements will make all the difference.

### **Cycling to school – Cycle Permits**

We have a very healthy number of students choosing to cycle to the academy, which is great for our carbon footprint, and reduces traffic congestion as less parents use cars to transport children. Unfortunately, this does mean the current cycle shed is simply not large enough. I am exploring purchasing additional bike racks, to ease the situation. More importantly, we are ensuring that all students who cycle to the academy, and their parents, have completed and signed a 'Cycle Permit' document that lists expectations for safe cycling to the academy. Once completed, students receive a Cycle Permit card with ID. Should a student cycle in an unsafe way to or from the academy, or ride an unworthy bicycle, this permit may be withdrawn for a period of time. A small number of cyclists have let themselves down on occasion recently, particularly when cycling from the direction of The Mermaid, onto Churchill Drive. I am determined to ensure they learn from their mistakes, before someone is badly injured. Parent support with this is appreciated, as is reporting unsafe cycling to/from the school.

### **Youth Club**

As you will be aware, the RCBC Youth Service continue to run a Youth Club at the academy two evenings a week. They would like us to draw to your attention a number of changes to how the sessions will run. From Monday 20 February, please note that Mondays 7-9pm will be mixed sessions for Y7 & Y8 only. Tuesdays 7-9pm are now boys only Sessions for Y9, Year 10 and Year 11 students only. I understand there is an additional girls only session now running at Tuned In! in Redcar. Please note we've been asked to say the sessions are now only open to Outwood Academy Bydales students. Parents are asked for their support in ensuring students only attend the correct session. For further information, please contact [Helen.Higgs@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk](mailto:Helen.Higgs@redcar-cleveland.gov.uk) on 01642 513657.

### **Drum Lessons**

We are keen to set up some additional drum lessons in school, aimed at Year 7 and Year 8 students, but we need a minimum of four to sign-up and make this viable. Students can see Mrs Trenholm for more details. Parents should call 01642 603600 or visit [www.tvms.org.uk/get-involved/lessons/](http://www.tvms.org.uk/get-involved/lessons/) for details of the costs and what is involved.

All the best for another fantastic term, and thank you for your continued support of what we are aiming to achieve for your young people, it is very much appreciated.

Yours faithfully



**Andrew Wappat**  
Principal

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