



Monday, 22 November 2021

Parent, Carer and Student Survey Update

Dear Parents, Carers and Students,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your recent support in completing the school survey. In particular, thank you for the detail provided in the comments section. Your feedback is extremely valuable to us and along with that from students and staff helps us make our school an even better place.

Although I cannot cover every comment in this letter, there were some common themes highlighted in the survey from both students and parents which I can elaborate on here.

School Uniform

We value our school uniform highly and it represents our school ethos with students wearing it with pride. There are many advantages associated with it such as preparing students for work, removing distractions for students and the prevention of bullying.

Some families have raised the issue of uniform cost, especially in the current economic climate associated with the pandemic. The government has just set out new proposals and I await new formal legislation and guidance to make school uniforms more affordable. I am glad to report that we are already working with suppliers to ensure our uniform is as cost-effective as possible for families from September 2022. Further information will be provided early next term.

Diversity Education

We celebrate diversity at Toot Hill School. In a society so varied in terms of race, religion, disability, gender and sexual orientation, we strongly believe equality and diversity must be promoted throughout our curriculum. For example, we have recently celebrated Black History Month in tutor set but more importantly we 'usualise diversity' at Toot Hill School by ensuring our whole school curriculum teaches students about black history across the subject areas.

Toilets

We still do have male and female toilets at our school. The difference compared to before 2020 is that these toilets are in open areas with CCTV in operation, with the area divided into male and female areas. These toilets in the English, Geography, Science and Maths areas are considerably more popular than in previous years because of their welcoming, clean and safe design.

Staff Mobile Phone Use

Staff do not use their phones for personal use during lessons. They can access the school register and email system through their mobile phones. This system can be used if there is a problem with the school network and enables teachers to still take school registers in a timely fashion as well as provide credits to students.

Cover Lessons

All schools have seen the pandemic affect staffing leading to the increased use of cover teachers from external agencies. We do employ our own internal Cover and Learning

Toot Hill School | The Banks, Bingham, Nottingham NG13 8BL

Telephone: 01949 875550 | Email: contact@toothillschool.co.uk | Website: www.toothillschool.co.uk

Executive Head Teacher: **Sandra Paley** BSc (Hons), PGCE, MEd | Head of School: **Christopher Eardley** BSc (Hons), PGCE, PhD

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Assistants (CLAs) to ensure consistency during periods of staff absence. In addition, we aim to utilise the same highest quality external supply staff where possible. Heads of Department also arrange internal teaching swaps if a teacher is experiencing a lengthy period of absence. The school would love to run a surplus of teaching staff to avoid the use of cover staff but school budgets do not facilitate this. As disruption caused by the pandemic continues to subside, we expect to see a parallel reduction in the number of cover lessons.

Future Surveys

A number of parents and carers commented that the survey was too brief. We will continue with surveys throughout the year with the intention that each one provides a different school improvement focus and enables parents, carers and students to complete them in a short time.

A Safeguarding Update for Parents and Carers: Keeping our Students Safe from Harmful Sexual Behaviours

Towards the end of last academic year there was a national focus on harmful sexual behaviours, triggered by the 'Everyone's Invited' campaign. Ofsted were commissioned to explore the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence in the lives of school children. Ofsted published its findings in June 2021 and set out a number of recommendations for schools, which we have been implementing. There were assemblies for all students at the end of the summer term and at the start of this term, to raise the profile of these issues and ensure everyone understood their responsibilities as part of our school community. Some initial student panels have helped us to construct a realistic picture of their day-to-day experiences, and staff have received additional training during INSET.

Reassuringly, the pupils focus groups fed back that students rarely, if at all experience sexual violence or harassment in school and that if they do, it is reported and dealt with seriously by the school. However overwhelmingly, all year groups highlighted social media and the virtual world as the place they felt most unsafe. Arguably, the area of children's lives that is most difficult for schools to influence is their 'online' activity. Unfortunately, this is where a significant proportion of harmful sexual behaviours take place between peers. This is also where families can play a vital role in keeping children safe. Ensuring that children adhere to social media age limits, appropriate privacy settings and codes of conduct can be done at home, and it helps children understand their responsibilities online. Our children fed back that they were most likely to experience bullying in apps such as WhatsApp or TikTok, or are pressured for or sent nude pictures on apps such as Snapchat, starting from Year 5 or 6. Our student panels inform us that they rarely tell parents as they don't know how to and don't want their phones to be confiscated.

In order to help families keep their children safe online, we have invested in a package from National Online Safety which provides parents with an App to help you better understand the online world and how to safeguard your child/children as best as you can.

We will be sending out the link and login to access this package of support in a separate email.

Thank you so much for your continued support. I look forward to providing your more detailed information throughout the year through means such as Online Information Evenings and Parent Forum meetings.

Yours sincerely,



Dr C Eardley
Head of School