

Friday 28 May 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

We hope you are well.

We write to you at the end of our first half term working together as Associate Principals at Okehampton College. We intend to expand this communication into a redesigned College newsletter over the coming months, as part of what we hope will be a long and productive relationship between school and home.

As part of the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, Okehampton College holds strong values which underpin its identity. We are passionate about, and committed to these values which lock to respect, support for every student, and the right of all to learning. Our simple aim is nothing more, and nothing less than for all our students to leave us as highly qualified, personable, articulate, and socially responsible young citizens, ready to lead happy and enriching lives. And to this end, our expectations as a College are unapologetically high. It is our ambition to be renowned for the exceptional education we provide, whilst being rooted in the community we serve. Through inclusion, scholarship, and nurture we wish our students to grow, intellectually and emotionally, in a safe, supportive and inspiring environment. We recognise the different strategies which must be in place to ensure that our young people thrive and, to this end, would like to share our plans about some exciting changes and developments. As an additional part of this communication, we have also outlined some of the details of our plans going forward which aim to clarify development work which has taken place during this half term.

We are restructuring our **Pastoral System** to create dedicated teams for each year group. In addition to our five existing Heads of Year, each year group will have an Assistant Head of Year and a designated member of Senior Leadership attached to it. These newly expanded teams now have their own office space to provide a quieter, less crowded environment that offers privacy when needed. Our ambition is to foster increased academic challenge, parallel to the development of personal wellbeing. In this way a careful balance of relational support will be in place which is set against our restated high expectations so that all students reach their potential.

A second development is our **Wellbeing Hub**. We believe in building character and self-esteem through our commitment to student wellbeing. Primarily this will be through enabling students to develop a positive outlook, and resilience, so that they are better equipped to embrace an ever-changing and challenging world. After half-term, all students will be able to access a new support provision at key times such as break and lunch. The Wellbeing Hub will also offer targeted interventions which will form part of our developing framework for wellbeing so that our young people can explore and process their feelings in a safe space. The Wellbeing Hub will more effectively connect and support the work of the safeguarding, pastoral and learning support teams by triaging students' needs towards a more creative resource which complements the work of the wider school.

Our Wellbeing Hub demonstrates a renewed commitment to supporting students in acquiring important tools with which they can build healthy and fulfilling relationships which underpin their lives going forwards.

Lastly, the **Holditch Centre** will be opening after half-term on the Wardhayes site. The opening of this facility aims to create an alternative provision for students at risk of exclusion which focuses on a relational curriculum. The focus of this curriculum will include themes such as respect, pride, self-belief, happiness, teamwork, meeting challenges, and relationship building. In this provision we aim to ensure the best beginnings for all our students by instilling the highest expectations, fostering excellent habits of attendance and conduct so that they are better able to access the curriculum.

We hope that you will see that in outlining our plans for the period after half-term that our ambition is unequivocal and unambiguous. Strengthening our offer to better support the growth of happy, healthy students who feel safe, is fundamental to helping them feel part of a happy, healthy, and safe school.

Building on positive steps, such as the restating of our high expectations, the introduction of a newly restructured Pastoral System, a Wellbeing Hub, and the soon to be opened Holditch Centre, we aim to increase consistency and personal development for every student. We seek to help each student achieve a real sense of who they are and what they can offer to their community and the wider world. No-one should ever be left behind. We hope you will work alongside us in making everyone proud to be part of our school community, and to participate fully in it.

It is clear from the hard work of staff over the course of this half-term that there is confidence, commitment, and excitement about the development projects to come. We share a strong belief in our wonderful staff and students. There is much more to do at the College over the summer term, but we already have a clear view about some of the next steps in the College's journey. We look forward to sharing our plans with you in the coming weeks, months, and years. We know that a successful and happy school depends on all of us working together.

Should you require any further information or clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Craig Griffiths and Rebecca Mullins. The signature of Craig Griffiths is on the left, followed by a period, and the signature of Rebecca Mullins is on the right.

Craig Griffiths and Rebecca Mullins
(Associate Principals),

Behaviour and System Amendments

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to the many families who have contacted us in the last two weeks to express their support of the actions we are taking, and in light of the social media postings and local print media reports. We very much welcome your support and are genuinely appreciative of the time taken to offer it.

Since returning from the January-March lockdown, we have seen a significant increase in issues around mental health amongst our students, as have schools [across the country](#). As a trust we have dedicated a huge amount of our resources to supporting students through the difficulties they are facing. Our staff, including our dedicated safeguarding team, have worked tirelessly and quietly behind the scenes to ensure that students and families most affected receive the support they need.

The disruption caused by the pandemic to routine and normal school life has been profound: we understand the impact and staff have worked rigorously to ensure that we provide the most appropriate support for all our students. Moreover, we know that this disruption affects some students more than others; indeed, some students cope with uncertainty and anxiety better than others, depending on their personal circumstances. For some students, the disruption caused by the pandemic has manifested itself on the return from the January-March lockdown. Essentially, this was perhaps an inevitability through a loss of routines and habits that we know enable students to flourish as learners, and as the thoughtful, and courteous members of our community we know them to be. Regrettably, we have seen an increase in internal truancy from lessons and in truancy off site, which you will appreciate, given our overriding priority to ensure children's safety, causes significant disruption to the running of the school. There has also been an increase in more challenging behaviour from a small minority of students. It is therefore imperative that we restate our expectations to secure a consistent, and inspiring learning environment in which all young people and staff work together.

Students thrive when expectations about their behaviour are high and clear. We want the very best for our students, so that they expect the very best of themselves. To this end clarity about the consequences for any poor choices of behaviour is essential. Our students' behaviour matters because *they* matter, because everyone in our community matters.

Student Feedback

Before the reiteration of our expectations and the implementation of the changes to our behaviour systems, we sought the views of our students. Surveys took place in the autumn term on 'Keeping Safe', and 'Bullying', and 'Keeping in Touch'. Earlier this month, and as part of the ongoing evaluation of our provision, we arranged 8 different student focus groups with a range of colleagues from our Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust family. These focus groups were set up to seek students' views about a range of themes, including behaviour. Around 90 students were involved in these focus groups — a sample that we ensured was representative of the student population. Common feedback from the students was that since returning from the January-March lockdown behaviour was not always good in school, and that this was caused by a minority. Students expressed some concern about disrupted learning and their sense of feeling safe. This feedback corroborated our own observations as a staff. Suffice to say, we listened carefully and

took our students' views seriously, resulting in the reiteration of our expectations and system changes that we communicated to students via tutors on Friday 14 May. This was followed with a planned series of events in the week beginning 17 May, including a whole school assembly, and a set of extraordinary school council meetings where students shared their desire to learn in a courteous and cooperative environment.

Our High Expectations

As part of this support of our students we must be concrete and avoid ambiguity. This means defining explicitly what we mean by good behaviour so that all student grasp what is expected of them. As part of a Civic Trust we must support students who have previously not understood what is expected of them. And our commitment to inclusion means that we must not deny any student the opportunity of acquiring the positive habits of behaviour that we know will underpin their future successes. It is a core responsibility of the College to help our young people become the well qualified, personable, articulate, and socially responsible young citizens we aim for them to become. We cannot leave behaviour to chance, because getting it wrong has the potential to do much damage. All students have the right to learn and be taught in disruption-free classrooms; all Teachers have the right to teach without disruption or fear of abuse; all members of our community have the right to be treated with respect and courtesy; and we assure you that we will always uphold and protect these rights.

To this end, whilst we are sincerely sorry for any misunderstanding that we may have caused regarding the recent reiteration of expectations and system changes, we are equally confident of how rightly placed these expectations are. To echo the message that we gave in our joint letter of Sunday 16 May, we are working hard to ensure that all our students can learn and excel in a supportive environment grounded in courtesy, politeness, good manners, kindness, respect, and consideration for others. As such we expect our students to conduct themselves courteously in and around the College, during break, lunchtime, and movement between lessons, meaning that we expect that our students:

- Will wear correct uniform correctly (including blazer and shoes).
- Will remove their coats in classrooms.
- Will walk directly to their lesson (they will not run, loiter or amble in corridors).
- Will walk quietly around the site (they will not shout).
- Will walk on the left (not on the right or in the middle) following the one-way system.
- Will eat and/or drink only in dining areas or outside.
- Will put litter in bins and pick up litter if they are asked.
- Will keep their hands to themselves.
- Will be courteous to staff, other students, and visitors.
- Will cooperate with all staff politely and without hesitation.
- Will ensure any electronic device is out of sight and switched off.
- Will give banned items to staff on request without hesitation.
- Will greet staff when staff greet them.
- Will always use 'please' and 'thank you'.
- Will always use appropriate language (no swearing or derogatory or inflammatory comments).
- Will hold doors open for people.
- Will help others.

Adaptations to COVID-19 Response Plan

Whilst we will still adhere to the system of control actions regarding 'prevention' of transmission of coronavirus and regarding our 'response to any infection', as laid out in the [DfE Operational Guidance](#) for schools, as today is the last on-site day for our Y11 students, we are able to make some amendments to the school timetable after half term to capitalise on the increased space, as outlined:

Preventative measures retained:

- Class groupings remain as they are, i.e., KS3 taught in tutor groups.
- Lessons 1 (periods 1 and 2), Lesson 2 (periods 3 and 4) and Lesson 5 (period 5) remain.
- All hygiene protocols remain and must be reinforced.
(e.g., hand sanitising on entry to and exit from rooms, desk cleaning, etc.).
- The one-way system remains in place.
- Dismissal from classrooms at the end of the day remains in place.
- Year group zoning remains in place for tutor time (i.e., registration takes place in current rooms).
- Students remain in their year group bubbles during break and lunch.
- Face coverings continue to be worn on transport to and from school, unless exempt.
- Face coverings continue to be worn by all adults in corridors and communal areas unless exempt.

Adaptations to be made:

- Classes return to having their lessons in subject area classrooms.
- Two breaks in the day rather than four.
- Two lunch sessions in the day rather than four.
- Toilets are no longer restricted to specific year groups.

Summer 2021 Awards: Mitigating Circumstances

May we politely remind all parents and carers of students in Y11-13 that further to our [letter of 21 May](#), if you believe that there are mitigating circumstances that teachers should take into account when arriving at TAGs for your child(ren) (see section 10, page 14 of our [policy](#)), please provide us with the detail by [completing this 'Mitigating Circumstances' form](#) at your earliest convenience. Thank you to the 33 responses we have thus far received. We have extended the deadline from Friday 28 May to Monday 31 May 23:59, when the form will close. (Students in Y12 and Y13 may complete this form themselves.)
















Progress Review Meetings with Tutors

Due to coronavirus restrictions, we have been unable to invite parents into College for our usual programme of Parents' Evenings. We will be holding Progress Review meetings with tutors next month, giving the parents and carers of all students in Years 7 to 10 and Year 12 an opportunity to meet with tutors, via video call, to discuss progress. Further information will follow after half-term.

COVID-19: Restrictions in England

From 17 May

STEP 3

MEETING OTHERS  <p>You can meet outdoors in groups of up to 30 people. You can meet indoors in groups of up to six people or two households.</p> <p>You don't have to stay 2m apart from friends and family, but consider the risks to you and those you are with.</p>	OVERNIGHT STAYS  <p>Domestic overnight stays are allowed, in groups of up to six people or 2 households.</p>	EDUCATION  <p>Schools, colleges and universities fully open.</p> <p>Regular testing provided.</p>	WORK AND BUSINESS  <p>You should continue to work from home if you can.</p>
RETAIL AND PERSONAL CARE  <p>Open.</p>	BARS, PUBS AND RESTAURANTS  <p>Open.</p> <p>Groups of up to six people or two households allowed indoors.</p> <p>Groups of up to 30 allowed outdoors.</p>	ACCOMMODATION  <p>All holiday accommodation open, including hotels, hostels and B&Bs.</p>	LEISURE AND SPORTS FACILITIES  <p>Open indoors and outdoors, including gyms, indoor sports facilities, swimming pools, saunas and steam rooms.</p> <p>Organised sport and group exercises allowed.</p>
ENTERTAINMENT  <p>Open indoors and outdoors, including cinemas, bowling alleys, zoos and theme parks.</p>	LARGE EVENTS  <p>Events, including live performances, business events and sporting events can proceed with capacity limits, indoors and outdoors.</p>	DOMESTIC TRAVEL  <p>Travel safely. Plan ahead and avoid the busiest times and routes if you can.</p>	OVERSEAS TRAVEL  <p>Check whether your destination is on the red, amber or green list. You should not travel to red and amber countries. If you are travelling to a green country, check the rules in your destination as testing or quarantine requirements may be in place.</p>
PLACES OF WORSHIP  <p>Open. You can attend in groups of 6 people or 2 households.</p>	WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS  <p>Weddings, receptions, life events and wakes can take place with up to 30 attendees, indoors in a COVID-Secure venue, or outdoors.</p> <p>No limit on funeral attendees, subject to how many the venue can safely accommodate with social distancing.</p>	RESIDENTIAL CARE  <p>People who live in a care home can have 'low risk' visits out of the home without the need to isolate when they get back. Residents can also name up to five visitors.</p>	SHIELDING  <p>If you are clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) you do not need to shield, but should continue to take extra precautions such as shopping at quieter times of the day. You can follow the same advice on meeting friends and family as everyone else.</p>

For more information and detailed guidance visit:
gov.uk/coronavirus

COVID-19
Let's take this next step, safely.

