

Monday 27th February 2023

Dear Parents / Carers

Student Protests – Important updates

You may be aware through the mainstream and social media of a series of “protests” around the country in schools, through which organised groups of students are refusing to follow basic rules (truancy lessons, refusing to adhere to basic expectations, boycotting classes, etc).

Whilst at Netherwood, we have only experienced this phenomenon to a very small-scale extent, I am writing to seek support from parents and carers to ensure that all students can attend the academy, experience high-quality learning and be safe whilst doing so.

A number of students have already spoken to colleagues about being “press-ganged” into joining these “protests”, and have understandably expressed their alarm at being in this position.

I wanted to write to you all to clarify the academy’s stance on any such behaviour going forward – “protests” will not be tolerated, and as a leadership team, we will clamp down on any disturbance of this kind in line with our academy behaviour policy. We cannot allow students to boycott lessons or disrupt the learning of others. I am sure you will agree that our focus should be on ensuring all students can learn in a disruption-free environment, which is safe and calm at all times.

Where students have legitimate concerns, we will be more than happy to listen to these, and we will continue to promote the avenues through which they can do this. However, ‘protests’ must not be confused with legitimate forms of student voice.

Our Pastoral Team led by Progress Leaders, Student Managers and the Behaviour Manager, together with Form Tutors, are always willing to listen and advise our students. All these avenues have a direct link to the Senior Leadership Team and any issues raised will be responded to.

I want to thank those students who have already shared concerns and responded to issues appropriately. We will remind all students tomorrow about the various avenues available to them to raise issues in a sensible and orderly manner, ensuring all students have a voice in the school.

Our expectations remain as follows:

- Students arrive on time (by 8.30am) in the correct uniform and make their way calmly to their year group Morning Address locations or form rooms.
- At break and lunch, students must remain in their designated spaces (the auditorium, Heart Space and amphitheatre only). This helps to keep students safe in a calm and positive environment, under direct supervision of academy staff.

- If students bring placards, banners or any other material that is designed to instigate a protest, this will be confiscated and parents/carers will be contacted to discuss the matter. Protests will be treated and sanctioned as forms of disruption in line with our behaviour policy. This includes the possibility of suspension and permanent exclusion if students are involved in incidents of serious disorder.
- If any students refuse to follow instructions, including attending lessons and using the correct social spaces, we will continue to apply the behaviour policy as usual, by issuing a sanction and contacting parents and carers.
- In line with existing academy policy, students must not use their mobile phones whilst in the academy. I would appreciate parents and carers helping us remind their children that the use of mobile phones and the sharing of video online is not acceptable because it is a serious safeguarding and privacy concern. As normal, any instances of this will be sanctioned according to the behaviour policy.
- We will continue to work with the relevant authorities, including the local police, to help monitor and support any situation which emerges. We would be grateful if parents and carers could ensure they are monitoring their children's social media accounts and alert us to any inflammatory content evident.

I would like to finish by acknowledging that a very significant majority of our students always conduct themselves to the highest standard. We know that parents, carers and families are very supportive of the academy in ensuring that we can continue to provide a safe and calm environment in which students can be happy and learn. We appreciate any time you can take to discuss these issues with your children.

It is my sincere hope that Netherwood will not become an arena in which disruptive and potentially unsafe "protests" take place; needless to say, should any issues arise, we will discharge our statutory responsibilities accordingly and, where necessary, involve the police to support.

Very best wishes and with thanks in anticipation of your support.



Mr J Mitchell
Principal