

Parents' Forum - 11 June 2019

1. Why has the girls' blazer changed? The old blazer was durable and well-liked, whereas the boys' blazer has a 'wet dog' smell when wet!

Feedback from Lynn Blake, Head of Administration:

The tweed used in the jacket is the fabric used for our new boys' jacket, phased into our stock two years ago. The tweed is more durable, and is the one we moved to, away from the previous old Harris tweed which we knew from parental feedback was not as durable as we would have liked. Parental feedback on the new boys' jacket has been great. Parents really like the "Teflon" coating and we have haven't had any quality issues (to date).

With regard to the wet dog smell, it is – unfortunately – the smell of wool when wet. It is a comment heard before, although infrequently, but the only alternative would be to move to a fully synthetic jacket which might not have the same quality or look for our children and brand.

Style – The design was reviewed when we received a substandard set of jackets in the old design and due to factory changes were unable to replicate the old jacket in the same fabric and style. All parents who brought the substandard jacket last year were told that when the new style jacket was delivered they would have the option of the upgrade, but if not that there would be a two year transition period. Personally, I think the new jacket is stunning and very flattering. It has a tailored waist whereas our old girls jacket was, in fact, a boys' style jacket. We think this might have happened from when there were just a few girls in the school as it was so boxy without any tailoring to it at all. Initial anecdotal feedback has been positive, too.

RCFO asked about the introduction of the option of trousers for girls - this was met with a positive response.

2. Why are end of year exams for First to Fourth Year after half term? Would we consider holding them earlier, so the children get a break?

RCFO explained that internal exams were positioned then for a variety of reasons. These include separation from public exams, and keeping the children focused for longer in the Summer Term. Ms May, Deputy Head Academic, also reports that some parents and children like having the week to revise.

A discussion followed about the guidelines given re revision, which can differ between Departments and individual teachers. Some advised 4 hours per day; others that the normal school timetable should be followed (RCFO said the latter was excessive for younger students!). Ms May has confirmed that the Teaching & Learning Committee are reviewing this, so that students receive a consistent message in future. There will be more revision given as homework ahead of internal exams, too, especially for First and Second Years. In addition, more emphasis will be given in PSHE on revision techniques, to ensure all get the same message and benefits.

3. RCFO asked about whether parents would support an Assisted Places campaign once the Activity Centre appeal was closed?

This was greeted positively. RCFO explained that the purpose of the Development Office was to help fund 'extraordinary' benefits for the children and to encourage a culture of giving - to benefit both current students and future generations. All 'run of the mill' investments and improvements are budgeted out of fees; the Development Office raise money for projects beyond this, or, as in the case of the Activity Centre, to enhance a project, taking it beyond the necessary to the very special. The school will focus its investment into improving our teaching spaces as the next major project; the Development Office campaigns will be alongside, and complementary but distinct.

4. Is vaping a serious problem in the College? Sixth Formers had been spotted, and there was concern it was happened in changing rooms, where staff are not allowed.

RCFO thanked for the intelligence re the Sixth Form and will follow up with Jon Carr, Head of Sixth Form. Similarly, with Sally Hall and the Sports Department re the changing rooms. In terms of our students, like all these things, it does happen; our focus must be on education our children to make sensible choices. Interestingly, (and happily), when we had a sniffer dog in earlier in the year, no drugs were found following an extensive search in Locker Bases and the grounds. RCFO reiterated that we are not complacent, and any positive confirmation of drug use is dealt with, though not publicised for obvious reasons.

5. There is still a perception that Sport is the most important non-academic pursuit at the College – how are you addressing this?

RCFO acknowledged that it often does appear that Sport is more important, not least as it features so heavily on our social media. This was something that the College was determined to tackle. In terms of recognition, unless national finals or equivalent are reached, in Chapel Assembly, accolades are consciously focused on all other aspects of school life. For example, this week's commendation was for a Cambridge essay prize winner. Similarly, Mr Quesnel, Director of Music, now invites individual musicians to play before Chapel starts, to showcase talent in this area. Parents agreed it might be more perception than reality – but students' perceptions are their reality! Several good suggestions followed about how to promote the College's excellence Drama, Art and Music, which RCFO will take up with Marketing Department.

6. Please can the specific child be named when an e mail is sent home, not just 'your child', as sometimes parents don't know to which one the communication refers?

Noted – RCFO to speak to admin team. It was commented that e mail was the preferred form of communication to parents regarding plays, concerts, etc.

7. Please can the trips be published in advance, so parents can plan accordingly?

We certainly had this on Firefly at one point; RCFO to follow up.

8. Teachers' consistency (or lack thereof!) in applying the Behaviour Policy was discussed.

RCFO agreed this was important, both for sanctions and merits, and promised to take this back to the teaching body. Fairness is essential.

RCFO thanked the attendees for their time – please come again, and meanwhile, raise any concerns by e mail!