

HEADMISTRESS' FORUM TO CURRENT PARENTS - MONDAY 21 NOVEMBER 2016

RCFO

Welcome and introduction. The Forum platform is intended for parents to discuss their concerns, but due to timing it will not be possible for everyone to speak, so apologies in advance for this. Due to numbers, future Fora may be divided into sections (i.e. Lower School, Middle School and Sixth Form). Notes from this and all Fora will be posted on Firefly.

SCHOLARSHIPS

The current system is that Sport, Music and Academic scholarships are eligible to be awarded upon entry to the First Year, with Art and Drama added at Third Year. All are reviewed again for entry into Sixth Form. I have changed the process from this year. A letter has been sent to all First and Second Year parents to inform them that there will be an opportunity for scholarship assessments in the Second Year, alongside the Third Year external joiners, for all areas above. The exception will be Academic scholarships, which will be awarded at the start of the Third Year, based on performance in the end of First and Second Year examinations.

TEACHING CONCERN PROCESS

All parents who make a complaint about the consistency and/or quality of teaching are advised that their enquiry will be investigated. What does this mean? First, rest assured that action is taken on each and every complaint. Normally the process is as follows - first, the teacher concerned will be informed and the issue discussed with their line manager, usually the Head of Department. HoDs will then be involved to review specific issues and to work out how to best support and monitor the staff with feedback. The Deputy Heads may also be involved to monitor and support. We follow clear processes to ensure staff improvement, but please do continue to raise your concerns; they are all taken seriously.

INDUCTION

First Year Parents' Evening was good and we should reflect on the positive aspects of the school. One issue is the induction welcome pack does not give enough information on key aspects, such as uniform. More notice should be given when uniform is required – not just communicated through the children (First Year).

Mrs Owens (RCFO) will pass this feedback to Admissions Department and the relevant HoYs.

This has been noted and the welcome pack is under review for next year.

WARNINGS & DETENTION

My son in Second Year is struggling with organisation and has had warnings and received detention which has caused a lack of confidence. This system is undermining some boys generally.

Merits and warnings are contradictory i.e. despite receiving several merits a child may still go to detention due to warnings. System is demoralising.

There should be more consistency between Group Tutors for warnings (Second Year and U6). Perception that warnings are given for some incidents and not others.

RCFO is aware of our disciplinary process but not involved with day to day. What is the common view of the system by parents?

RO recognises that the merits and warnings are sometimes difficult to equate (i.e. warning for poor homework vs merits for politeness).

RCFO: consistency always difficult in life – some staff more strict, others lenient, but recognise there should be a balance. Happy to review with HoYs.

CURRICULUM

In this changing world, is the school curriculum fit for purpose?

Art and creativity is not taken seriously by the College. Ability to create is essential and students should learn how to think creatively. The College should always be forward looking (Fourth Year and Lower Sixth)

Creative thinking: what is the school and teaching body doing to encourage this?

RCFO recognises that fundamentally, probably not. However, SGC will not make massive changes to GCSEs and A Level systems. However, IT approach can, and should, change. Deputy Head Staff, Mr Wright, is reviewing IT strategy for the College.

RCFO: points noted and agreed that students should learn how to analyse and construct arguments. However, current exams are still based on retentive knowledge and the curriculum is aligned to this. But yes, it is essential that children interact and think creatively and that we must listen.

RCFO: students should think more and ask questions; best lessons are when children are unafraid to ask questions. Staff also should accept that being questioned is not a bad thing. Heads of Departments are the main 'engine room' between Senior Team and Teachers to encourage creativity. Staff should be open to learning as the students to set an example. We are looking at INSET to be organised for this.

YOUNG ENTERPRISE & DUKE OF EDINBURGH

Complaint about lack of support for Young Enterprise at the PA Christmas Market (and unnecessary discipline).

Like YE, DoE support dwindles after first impetus, and is not thorough.

RCFO: There appears to have been a miscommunication, as students are usually escorted by an advisor. Unable to comment further as unaware of this incident.

Both DoE & YE are projects which are intended for students to be self-motivated and organise themselves. Whilst students may be expecting too much support, it is recognised that this may need to be reviewed. Will look into.

ADMISSIONS

Current parent with a child starting at the College in September from state school. Has been advised that there will be interviews as part of the entrance exams in January and also that a reference from current school is no longer required. What other changes are to come? (Third Year and Y6)

RCFO: 'interview' will not be academic! Intended to be a simple chat with easy questions to gain an insight into the child, over and above the statistics from English, Maths, VR and NVR papers. It will also help in the decisions process should a child have a bad day with the exam papers. Reports are still required from feeder schools. No further changes to the entrance exams are planned.

U6 CERTIFICATES

Timetabling for OG match has changed to a week before universities finish which means they will need to travel back early. Also no certificates until January (Second Year and OG 2016)

RCFO: The OGs match is always on the Sunday before we break up, so it's Sunday 11 December this year. *(Subsequent note - The Certificate Evening is on Tuesday 3rd January at 7pm and letters have been sent out).*

GCSE SUBJECTS

French is taught in the lower years, but this is no longer relevant, should we consider Spanish/Chinese which reflects the global marketplace?

The English Language and RS GCSEs are taken early in Fourth Year and this should be reviewed. Other schools do Maths and English early.

c.f. Good 'wake-up call' – son did badly in early English Language GCSE and it spurred him on to do better the following year!

RCFO: Mandarin is not provided currently as the take up would be relatively small, unless we made compulsory. This is also a very tough GCSE to achieve good grades (vs Spanish/French) and parents/students are often more motivated by ability to get top grades. However, MFL provision is currently being reviewed – I will pass this feedback to Ms May.

RCFO: in the short term, we will not change this system as both of these are done early to ease the burden at the end of the Fifth Year. Aware that schools do this differently, and happy to revisit.

PARENTS' EVENINGS

Parents' Evenings are too far on in the Fifth Year, should be earlier in the year.

5 minutes not long enough to discuss key topics.

NOTED! This will be reviewed.

Point taken; however, to create longer time slots is challenging as with the current system, staff often start at 4.30pm and don't finish until 9pm. Also, longer than 5 minutes is usually not required. To be reviewed.

NEW A LEVEL SYSTEM

Unsure that the new system is right. 50% students give up an A level too quickly. Should 4 A levels option be kept open? Other schools provide this.

(Side note, very positive about SGC – First and Second Year were great two years without stress after 11+ and enabled my child to gain confidence and friendships!)

A close eye should be kept on this new system as not convinced that the students are getting enough options.

RCFO: accepted some schools do 4 A levels in L6 but then one is dropped. But in order to get an AS qualification in the one then dropped, all examinations would have to be taken if unsure which would be given up. The results would then be discarded for those subjects being continued; a waste of effort. It also means a loss of approx. 3 weeks teaching time for study leave at the end of L6. Also, Universities only ask for 3 A levels. Sixth Form Colleges may provide 4 subjects, but this can be due to government funding.

Options must depend on each individual student. The system should be monitored closely, including the new grading change 9 to 1 at GCSE. A big concern is that the university admissions tutors are not all up to date with the new system!

A LEVEL RESULTS DAY

The current system whereby students must come into school to get their results is out-dated.

RCFO: absolutely! This system will change so that results are released early (6am) and therefore quick action can be taken by students to contact universities.

MONITORING & ASSESSEMENT TEACHING STAFF

How are teaching staff monitored and assessed term by term?

RCFO: Head is reviewed by Governors, Senior Team by RCFO, HoDs by Senior Team and teachers by HoDs. This is done by annual appraisal to confirm 3 targets; Academic, Pastoral and Personal for professional development.

Are lesson observations always planned?

Yes, if part of formal appraisal. However, recently RCFO has undertaken daily 'walkabouts' and can visit up to 5 lessons at a time. This has received a positive response from staff. Additionally, HoDs are expected to drop into lessons unannounced throughout the year, to monitor their staff consistently.

Staff turnover over the last year was unexpectedly high. Is there a grasp on this?

With the change of HM, it is almost inevitable that staff turnover is higher the usual – reflected in all schools. However, this is also a reflection of successful staff who wish to progress. Nevertheless, we recognise that the College should work to retain good teachers with training and professional development.

SCIENCE CURRICULUM

Very happy with College in this first year – great welcome. One issue; curriculum for science appears to be shorter than at Hampton and RGS (First Year)

RCFO: Ms May has advised that SGC lessons are 10 minutes longer than at Hampton and in the First & Second Year we run a General Science Programme which covers all aspects in the National Curriculum and beyond. We separate the sciences in the Third Year and then offer 6 periods per week – as per Hampton. Furthermore, in the Fourth Year, we offer 9 periods per week for Triple Scientists In our Fifth Year, this increases to 12 periods per week for triple scientists – thus a further 240 minutes (4 hours) per week than at Hampton!

We believe that it's more beneficial to increase the time at GCSE, than in the First and Second Year. A further 90 minutes in the Fourth Year and 4 hours extra than Hampton in the Fifth Year is considerable.

GUITAR

Guitar lessons are timetabled in lessons – is there a better way to organise?

RCFO: yes, this is frustrating - however, the rota for music lessons is difficult with lunch, clubs etc. All schools are in the same boat. Younger students tend to have their lessons disturbed more than older years – this is intentional - due to GCSEs and A levels, older students get priority for lunchtime and after school lessons.

SPORT

More inclusive sport please! College sport is very elitist.

Capable tennis player not given the opportunity to play as he wasn't seen as good enough.

Fifth Year cricket team is not strong – the fixture list should be changed to allow for better matches.

RCFO: yes, feel very strongly that every child should be given the opportunity to play sport and represent their school.

COMMUNICATION

Information sent out for events is often poor with incorrect dates that need to be checked again with HoY. We should be setting a better example!

RCFO: noted! This will be reinforced to staff.

RCFO

Thank you to parents for coming, and I would encourage you all to come again to future Fora next term. Please advise in advance if you have any particular general concerns – feedback is also very welcome!