CORNELIUS VERMUYDEN SCHOOL

Respect, Resilience, Responsibility

2 February 2024

Dear Parents and Carers

Wow, what a week – and it's fair to say that it's been pretty non-stop since the parent/carer meeting on Wednesday 24 January. If you attended this, it was great to see you, and I hope that you are already hearing about some of the actions we are taking in the areas that we said we would be focussing on. Even if you didn't attend, I still hope the message coming home from your child/children is about the rapid changes that are happening in and around school.

The work to raise expectations and standards has very much begun and we, the Discovery Educational Trust (DET) team, have really enjoyed the discussions, conversations and chats that we have had with the pupils of Cornelius Vermuyden School.

It would be remiss of me, having spent just over a week in the school, not to mention the challenges it faces. That is clear to see, however, Ofsted has already highlighted the areas of concern, so there is no need to repeat those. What I am more interested in, is telling you what we are doing about them.

Hopefully your child has mentioned our presence in the school. This is already making a difference in more ways than one. Queues for food at break time and lunchtime are more orderly. The pushing and shoving that we witnessed at these times has stopped. Children in the corridor during lesson time are challenged and resolutions are found. The transitions from one lesson to another are monitored, and any issues are resolved. The pupils are also quickly realising that poor behaviour choices have consequences, including suspension. These are just some of the actions taken since our arrival in the school, but it gives you a flavour of what's to come.

There is a long way to go yet, but the DET team is pleased with what we have managed to accomplish in a short space of time. I would also like to take this opportunity to say that the Cornelius Vermuyden SLT has been extremely helpful in a number of areas. There are some very talented senior leaders at the school, which I hope gives you some reassurance that the DET team is not alone in driving school improvement.

Having met parents last week, and staff on Tuesday, we wanted to ensure that we also spoke to our pupils before the end of this week. Not just in an informal way, but also in assembly. We didn't want

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one year group hearing the message on Monday, and another on Tuesday, etc. (and rumours spreading), so we met with all year groups yesterday. It is vital that we articulate our journey, future plans and expectations with pupils – they are the most important stakeholder and the reason we all do our job. It is their school and they have a right to be regularly informed about 'what's going on'.

So, now that staff and pupils have been updated, to complete the triangulation, we need to inform parents/carers of the upcoming changes at the school.

From Monday:

- Pupils will be allowed to wear one single stud earring in each ear. The stud must be worn in the lower part of the earlobe and must be removed for PE.
- No other jewellery will be allowed (no rings, necklaces, bracelets etc).

This is not a policy change. This is the current school Uniform and Dress Code Policy, but it was not being adhered to.

From Monday:

- Make-up should be discreet – this means that we should not notice it.
- Fake tan should not be worn.

The current policy states that make-up and fake tan should not be worn. We agree that fake tan should not be worn, but we felt it more appropriate for pupils to be allowed to wear make-up, but it does have to be discreet. If a pupil arrives at school with make-up which we deem more than discreet, it will need to be removed.

We hope that this 'leeway' in the policy will be reciprocated with the good faith in which it was given.

From Monday:

We will be trialling allowing pupils to wear coats indoors. They have to be removed on entry to classrooms (lessons) and also in assembly. Hoods are not to be up either. There are a number of reasons why this was changed and, when I told the pupils, the change seemed to be greeted positively. Again, I hope the goodwill given will see pupils adhere to the expectations regarding this change.

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There are also 'givens' that we expect regardless, such as everyone wearing a tie (unless exempt), skirts rolled down and no earbuds to be worn in school.

From Monday:

Due to not having any bells in the school, lesson changeover can sometimes cause issues. The simple resolution to this is to turn on the bells. This will bring the clarity and structure needed, so it is clear when lessons start and finish, and also when break time and lunchtime start and finish.

There are a few things in the pipeline, which I would also like to share with you.

We have a 'not seen, not heard' mobile phone expectation. On the whole, we don't see many phones, but what is clear is that the pupils are using them. This needs to stop. Pupils have been given this message and I expect them to adhere to it.

After half term, we will expect pupils to adhere to the Uniform and Dress Code Policy regarding fake nails, nail varnish and false eyelashes. Additionally, we expect all pupils (unless exempt for medical reasons) to wear shoes and not trainers.

Before I move onto the next update, I would also like to add that we have changed the criteria for the Year 11 prom. I know that this does not affect you if your child is not in Year 11, but I think that it is good to share with everyone that this change has, hopefully, led to less anxiety for some pupils about attending prom. A separate letter about this will be sent out in due course.

We have a number of other things in the pipeline, which I would like to share with you.

The level of internal truancy (pupils skipping lessons) is too high. There has been a significant reduction since the DET team has joined, but it is still a concern. We intend to tackle this issue with robust measures but, before this comes into effect, all pupils have been advised to go to all lessons, all of the time.

Toilets in the school are an issue. They are used inappropriately by some, and this can make these areas intimidating places for others. They can feel unsafe. So, we are having concertina metal gates fitted to restrict the times that they are open. Currently, toilets are open all day, every day. This will change so they will only be open at certain times of the day, such as break time and lunchtime.

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Toilet passes will still be in use, but will be closely monitored. Pupils going to the toilet on a 'regular' basis will be asked to provide medical evidence that this is necessary.

As part of my assembly with pupils, I spoke of consequences of actions. It has been made very clear to all pupils that actions have a consequence. Unfortunately for some, they have already found out the 'hard way' this week, but I am hopeful that, now things have been explained in more detail, we will see more pupils making the right choices.

When I met with parents and carers, I said that our first aim was to ensure that the school is a safe environment, and that behaviour will be addressed. This has been our priority since our arrival and expectations and standards have already been raised. We have some way to go, but, as mentioned above, we have accomplished a lot in a short space of time, and we expect to accomplish even more very soon. You will be updated with our progress.

Anyway, this is a very long 'first letter' from me, so I will finish now by wishing everyone a lovely weekend and good luck to Year 11 in your mocks next week.

Yours sincerely

Mr R Duff
Chief Executive Officer
Discovery Educational Trust

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