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Dear Parent/Carer

Re-setting Pupil Expectations

As we reach the halfway point of Term 3, I wanted to write to you to provide you with details of a focus we will be having on secondary pupil behaviour over the coming weeks. I am afraid this is quite a long read but I would really appreciate it if you could take the time to get to the end as I am keen that parents know about and can support the school in the changes we seek to make.

Our whole school community has been through a difficult two years, and I feel that we continue to face some challenges in trying to get back to our normal ways of doing things. On returning to school after closures certain aspects of school rules were relaxed for reasons both of infection mitigation and pupil health and well-being.

For example, we relaxed uniform policy to allow parents more easily to follow government guidance on regular laundering of school clothes, and also to allow our young people to stay comfortable and warm in a context of windows having to stay open irrespective of the external temperature. We also actively encouraged young people to go to the toilet if they wished throughout the school day to avoid crowding at the toilets during breaks.

Given the personal challenges that some young people had faced as a result of lockdown, we further encouraged staff to be alert to the needs of young people who may be suffering from a degree of anxiety and to ensure that support took precedence over challenge in such cases. We also arranged for some young people to take time out of class to seek support from guidance staff if things were becoming difficult.

Whilst all of these actions were proportionate to the situation, inevitably there were some young people who began to take advantage of a more relaxed climate. For example, although we recently relaxed our dress code again to allow young people to wear a jumper of their choice to ensure they could stay warm, there are now a significant number of young people who have used this relaxation as an opportunity to come to school



completely out of uniform. Similarly, relaxation in our 'out of class' regulations have resulted in some pupils seeking to leave class simply as strategy to avoid work.

In addition to these specific examples, we have also seen a general decline in some cases of pupil attitude in classes which we attribute to both the impact of being out of school for a significant period of time as well as returning to a more relaxed climate. For example, in a range of classes, we have seen young people being slower to settle and quicker to lose focus. There has also been an increase in what we call 'low level disruption' such as talking over the teacher or failing to follow teacher instructions.

Although these things are causes for concern, the good news is that we are convinced that with some adjustments in rules and a concerted focus over the coming weeks, they are also things with we can effectively address.

On Monday, I will be speaking to all pupils to remind them of my expectations and to tell them about the approaches we will be adopting over the coming weeks to support this focus.

Below is a summary of what I will be saying:

Class rules

I will be reminding young people of these basic expectations:

- **Coming to class:**
- On time
- Prepared
- Expecting to learn

- **In class:**
- Listening to teacher and following instructions
- Not talking over the teacher or distracting class
- Respectful **at all times**
- Mobile devices out of sight **at all times**

Our school is often commended by visitors - formal and otherwise - for the positive relationships that exist between staff and pupils. We are confident that with a whole school and classroom level focus on these key ideas we will be able to create more positive and collaborative working environments. I need not say how important this is as we continue to make up for lost time due to the pandemic and move towards SQA exams for our senior pupils.

Pupils out of class

In order to monitor this issue more closely we will be asking staff over the next few weeks to limit opportunities for young people to be out of class. This might include things like returning a register folder or taking a resource to another teacher.

We will also introduce an 'out of class' slip which will be provided by staff to pupils who have a good reason for being out of class. Pupils in corridors without such a slip will be asked to return to their timetabled class. We will of course continue to allow pupils to go to the toilet when required but we have asked staff to note where this seems more frequent than might be expected and will consequently follow this up with parents if necessary. We will though ensure that young people continue to have access to guidance staff when appropriate.

Mobile Phones

Mobile phones are another source of low-level disruption and the time teachers are taking to remind pupils of our policy that they should keep them out of sight in class is getting in the way of learning and teaching. This is something that we will be focussing on in the next few weeks and it may be that you will be contacted if we are experiencing particular difficulty with your child. We are convinced that if pupils can just take a little more responsibility in this area, we can avoid taking a more draconian approach.

School Uniform

I would like to remind parents that we have reintroduced school uniform with the one exception that young people may wear a jumper or top of their choosing, rather than a black jumper or cardigan. **In all other respects, we expect compliance with our dress code:**

- Plain black footwear (including plain black training shoes)
- Black trousers (including plain black denims), black skirt or black leggings.
- White shirt or blouse
- School tie

We will be undertaking a spot check on uniform on Monday, and you will be contacted if your child is not in compliance with our dress code. A further check will be conducted on Monday 28th February. We believe uniform supports the development of school identity and can also reduce bullying behaviour. Parents also tell us that the pursuit of fashion can put an unhelpful pressure on our young people on school mornings in a way that uniform does not. I hope I will have your support in this matter.

Thank you for taking the time to read this lengthy letter. It would be really helpful to me if you could also speak with your child about these matters as a support for our forthcoming focus. As I say, I believe that the current challenges are directly related to the upheavals of the Covid pandemic, and I know from speaking to other headteachers that they are by no means unique to our school. I am very confident that with the commitment of staff, parents, and the young people themselves, we can bring about significant improvement over the coming weeks.

Yours faithfully



John Devine
Headteacher