



13 December 2019

Dear Parent/Carer

**RE: WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP TO KEEP YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE**

I am writing to you following meetings between Wealden Headteachers and regional police representatives. All local headteachers will be sending this letter to their communities. We are all aware of the national concern around County Lines operations and associated drug and knife crime. Some of the larger towns in East Sussex are working hard to disrupt and remove the existing operations of this type.

We support a community approach where we all work together to keep our young people safe. Following discussion with police colleagues we are sharing information with this letter which may be of value at any time but particularly as we approach a school holiday period. At Heathfield this is through PSHEe and other curriculum areas which explore both factual knowledge as well as decision making and choices at key stages. We deliver tutor-time lessons which provide awareness, in addition to assemblies and visiting speakers. Our well-being package ensures students are informed about healthy choices and self-help at times of anxiety and pastoral staff work with parents and agencies to support students who are vulnerable.

Out of school there are warning signs that can be observed and preventative actions which will be helpful to all parents or adults who have contact with young people. The police are keen to play their part but need our help; all information helps to build a picture that can enable them to disrupt and remove gangs or illegal operations. We have attached a summary to this letter containing information and points of contact for reporting or support.

In addition, we have been informed that due to an increase in anti-social behaviour in Heathfield, Police are upping their presence in the town over weekends. Operation Blitz has been set up in support and they can be contacted directly on: 07770 700642. If you have any concerns regarding anti-social behaviour you can ring this number on a Friday and Saturday night. This call will go straight through to a police officer or PCSO who will attend the incident as soon as possible.

If we are to work together as a community to ensure that Heathfield remains the safe environment of which we are so proud then we all have our role to play. We are very appreciative of the support that our community offers to the College, I am hopeful that by working together we can keep our young people safe from the outside influences that might pose a threat to their health, happiness and future success.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely

**MS C BARLOW**  
Headteacher

## Extra Information about County Lines and knife crime:

County Lines' is a term used to refer to drug networks, both gangs and organised crime groups, from large urban areas such as London, who use children and young people and vulnerable adults to carry out illegal activity on their behalf. Gangs dealing drugs is not a new issue but the extent to which criminal exploitation of children and vulnerable adults, as well as the increasing use of violence, has become an inherent part of it through 'County Lines' makes it especially damaging. Police continue to see children being exploited by criminal gangs to supply drugs in Sussex.

This can involve other illegal activity, for example knife crime. Some young people carry a knife because they are worried about becoming a victim of knife crime. Unfortunately, carrying a knife only increases their chance of becoming hurt. It is illegal to carry a knife or to try to buy a knife under the age of 18. The police can stop and search anyone they suspect of carrying a knife, the maximum penalty for which is 4 years in prison and an unlimited fine. An automatic prison sentence is handed to anyone convicted twice of carrying a knife.

The easiest and most common place for young people to get a knife is from the family home. If you think something isn't quite right then consider other less obvious warning signs, including:

- They have become withdrawn.
- Their school or college is reporting concerns about changes in their behaviour/progress.
- They have lost interest in hobbies and are vague about their movements.
- They have changed their group of friends, perhaps to an older network.
- Suddenly secretive about their belongings or exhibit unexplained new clothing or phone.
- Secretive about their whereabouts or activities outside the house.

There are other reasons why young people exhibit these behaviours, not knife related, but if you spot any of the above, talk to them. Discuss their views on knife crime, if they feel safe when they go out, and if not, why not? When you talk try to cover the following

- The dangers - carrying a knife makes you more likely to get harmed.
- The facts - the police can stop and search anyone they suspect to be carrying a knife.
- The law - it is illegal to try and buy a knife under the age of 18, and the maximum penalty for carrying a knife is 4 years in prison and an unlimited fine. An automatic prison sentence is handed to anyone convicted twice of carrying a knife.
- The consequences - a criminal record can change your life - you may not be offered a college or university place. Getting a job will be made more difficult and it can even disrupt travel to some countries.

**Make sure they know that the safest thing to do if threatened by a knife is to walk away. If you are concerned take action:**

- If a crime is being committed dial 999.
- If you want to report concerns around a young person as described above email the prevention youth officer on: [Wealden.PYO@sussex.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Wealden.PYO@sussex.pnn.police.uk)  
\*(or [Lewes.PYO@sussex.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Lewes.PYO@sussex.pnn.police.uk))
- Contact the PCSO's for Hailsham, Horam and Heathfield (Police Community Support Officer)  
[wealden@sussex.pnn.police.uk](mailto:wealden@sussex.pnn.police.uk) \*(or [Lewes.PYO@sussex.pnn.police.uk](mailto:Lewes.PYO@sussex.pnn.police.uk))

There are also many sources of further advice and assistance to help combat the harm caused by drugs, including;

1. FRANK - Provides straight-talking information about drugs - helpline 0800 77 66 00 and see their [website](#).
2. The Samaritans - Offer emotional support 24 hours a day. Their helpline number is 08457 90 90 90 and see their [website](#).
3. Childline - helpline 0800 1111 or go to [www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)
4. CrimeStoppers - anonymous helpline 0800 555111 or [www.crimestoppers-uk.org](http://www.crimestoppers-uk.org)