

## Ongoing Dialogue

On Monday 27 February 57 students who were involved with the incidents of last week were given space and time to individually express what they felt they wanted to get across to the College. This feedback has been analysed for patterns, trends and commonalities to see which areas might be worthy of further discussion.

It is interesting to note that of these students, 70% accepted they had not previously tried to raise their concerns or thoughts with anyone at College or through any of the existing systems. 10% had no desired outcomes and expressed that they did not really want to have been involved in the first place, they stated a fear of being resulting peer pressure if they tried to leave.

Of the common themes there are strands which have been previously visited by School Council with agreed outcomes which were accepted by the Student Council at the time. Some also have within them a range of opinion expressed which makes finding consistent views more complex. Some of the issues represent either a misconception or inconsistent application in College which we will need to unpick as part of the next stage.

In summary, three issues emerge in varying degrees:

- a) A perception that toilets are locked and students are prevented from accessing them.

This is not the case, there are no doors on the toilets and there are well publicized ways in which students can access them both in lesson time and in social time. This was re-visited with students and staff in September, January and February. Ongoing dialogue will look at how this works in practice for students in classrooms.

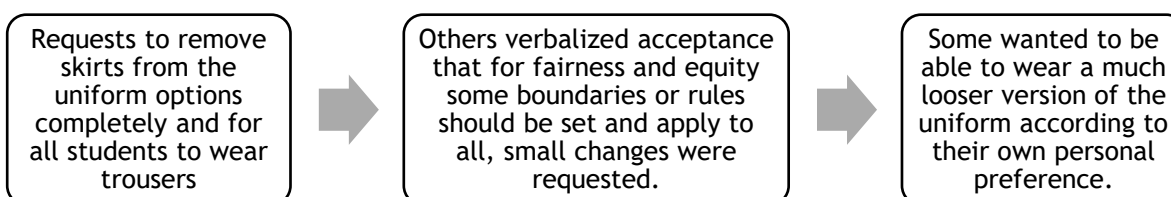
However, the toilets do not have constant supervision and there is also a duty of care and safeguarding of which we are required to take account. 55% of those involved in last week have also previously been involved in truanting, vaping or being in out of bounds areas. There is therefore an associated risk that we need to manage in the next stage of dialogue as well ensuring consistent application of a fair and appropriate approach by all staff.

There is also a reality that the College does not have enough toilets for the number of students, there is no ESCC support currently for improving this and so we are having to plan to commit considerable capital funds to renovate the facilities this summer. This has already been communicated to students through the usual channels and students have been invited to join a working group to help with design and implementation.

- b) A desire to relax the uniform policy.

A student group was involved with the uniform policy throughout last year and revisions were made to ensure greater student choice and greater staff consistency. Frequent staff guidance has given clarity on the way in which this should be checked and logged as “not in line with policy” if necessary to avoid any reference to gender related issues. This has been addressed with individual staff if necessary where inconsistency has been reported.

Opinions in the returns varied greatly ranging from:



Ongoing dialogue will revisit issues of equity, peer pressure and health and safety alongside requests for adjustments and manner of implementation that will be considered.

### c) Mental Health and Well-Being

It is a concerning issue for us all that young people feel their mental health is generically not important to adults. This is felt both inside and outside the College, the issues detailed above were sometimes quoted alongside a perception that these aspects “proved” a lack of care. However, in contrast others could quote both individual staff and overall approaches which clearly did show the College cared and had good provision above and beyond what is ‘standard’ for an educational setting.

The next stage of dialogue will involve a range of internal and external expertise to look at approaches and strategies that we can continue to develop alongside the myriad of ways in which we already supplement the provision we are funded for to support young people’s mental health.

Existing provision includes:

- Pastoral Managers (non-teaching) for each Year Group as well as separate Heads of Year
- The Hub and Therapeutic approaches for those with anxiety (built and resourced from College funds).
- Safeguarding and well-being staff roles and training for all staff.
- External Counselling support for students.
- Bespoke individual support for students who struggle with a school day.
- Mentoring and coaching available with 6<sup>th</sup> Form, Peer Mentoring Leaders with a more widespread approach to be developed by Values Leaders this year.
- External speakers and workshops - ongoing.

More details of the college approaches can be found [here](#) on the website.

### **Balance**

Whilst we recognise and are able to listen to views expressed in this situation, we also have to remember there is a vast majority of students who did not engage with last week’s incident, who did not wish to and whose voices and concerns should not be silenced by those who chose more disruptive ways of expressing themselves.

We are also clear that any strategies or ideas that come out of further discussion need to be aired in the normal forums which the remaining 95% of the student body use and engage with.

In a school of 1500, not everyone will agree and it is important all views are reflected - the loud and the quiet, those who take part in democratic processes and those who struggled to engage.

The original methods of communication remain and we will, as part of the next stage, be following up the extent to which students who stated they had raised issues with staff had been heard and if not why not.

Some of the responses to this first stage of dialogue had some good ideas about engaging those who normally choose not to engage. We will also look to actively develop these further so that all students have the opportunity to feel they have a channel of communication.

### **Next Steps**

We will now take each issue in turn and explore, through in person dialogue, the range of views and possible options with a selection of students from this group. We will also engage fully with a wider range of students including the existing leadership bodies who are already engaged in this work such as College Council, Values Leaders, the Uniform Group from last year and others.

This will take time but we aim to have some reflections and outcomes to relay back to students after the Easter break