



WALTON HIGH

Leading Learning

Walnut Tree Campus: Fyfield Barrow Milton Keynes MK7 7WH

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19 December 2019

Dear Parents

Newsletter

At this time of year, many people reflect on the past and think about the future. When reviewing 2019, Walton High's students and staff can feel rightly proud of their achievements and look forward with confidence to 2020.

One of the proudest moments for me this term was the manner in which staff responded to the two intruders at the Walnut Tree campus at the end of the school day on 25 November. As a number of parents have contacted the school regarding this incident, or posted messages on social media, I have decided to address the issues in this letter rather than respond to individuals because a number of important points were raised.

As you may know, the incident happened as students were leaving. The youths, who were not current or former students of Walton High, were brought to the school by the parent of a Y11 student following a call from her daughter.

Within seconds of the youths running past staff on duty at the gate, a member of the administration team had been radioed and the police called using the emergency 999 number. The youths were pursued by staff through the building and, before they could seriously harm the students they were targeting, they were tackled by staff. Colleagues acted bravely to protect students as they did not know at the time that the youths **were not carrying knives**. The youths were then escorted off the premises where one of them picked up a shovel that was in a bush by the Redway. Again, without hesitation, staff confronted the boy and removed the shovel so it could not be used as a weapon. The entire event happened very quickly, about three minutes from start to finish, and was over by the time the police arrived.

I should like to reassure parents that such incidents are very rare (since the school opened in 1999, I can only recall of something similar happening once before many years ago) and staff will always do their best to safeguard your children.

During and after the event, some people responded in a way that was helpful, whilst others were less helpful.

Helpful

- A number of parents contacted the school by email to express their appreciation for the action taken by staff. These were shared with colleagues involved and were much appreciated.
- Some parents and members of the community challenged on social media the inaccurate, misleading and unfairly critical comments posted. This was also much appreciated.
- Walton High has 2,230 students on roll; the overwhelming majority of parents did not contact the school that evening or the next morning by email or phone demanding to know what had happened. They therefore did not add to our workload and allowed the school to view the CCTV footage and get accounts from the fifteen members of staff involved before issuing a statement that accurately explained what had happened.

Unhelpful

- Some students and parents were hanging around outside the school when they heard there was an incident despite repeated requests from staff for them to disperse and go home.
- One student attempted to get involved as the youths were escorted off the premises.
- A few students falsely told their parents that they had seen a knife and one, completely uninvolved in the incident, even claimed it had been held to their throat. However, it was clear from the CCTV footage that the youths were not carrying anything as they entered and left the building and staff statements confirmed that there was no knife.
- Some parents and/or students contacted the local press and gave a false account of events. These were then further sensationalised by the journalist despite her receiving a statement from the school that advised the accounts she had received were inaccurate.
- Phoning or emailing the school demanding to know what had happened before the school had an opportunity to fully investigate and communicate with all parents.
- Some parents made inaccurate comments on social media, e.g.
 - the youths ran through the school threatening students with knives and a shovel
 - the school was obliged to inform Ofsted of the incident but had not done so. Yet schools have no such obligation as it is not Ofsted's role to become involved in such matters or deal with parents' complaints¹
 - claiming "This school lies about everything they will try their best to cover anything up."

As a school, we always aim to be as open as possible and communicate with parents in a timely manner, which, as in this case, is usually within 24 hours. However, the school will only communicate things it knows to be accurate and sometimes it takes time to establish all the facts. There may also be occasions when the police want to control the flow of information so as not to jeopardise their enquiries or the likelihood of a successful prosecution.

Although this incident only lasted a few minutes, dealing with its fallout is estimated to have consumed over 70 hours of staff time. We hope that when events happen at the school in the future, parents and students respond in a way that is helpful and supportive.

Keeping your child safe online

Despite the school's e-safety programme, our pastoral team are dealing with an increasing number of students who experience difficulties as a result of their inappropriate use of smartphones and social media. In discussions with parents following such incidents, it is worrying how many do not monitor their child's phone use, online presence or activate parental controls on devices. In the same way that responsible parents know whom their children are with and where they go whilst out, they also know that their child is using their smartphone appropriately by frequently monitoring its use. These parents are therefore best placed to keep their children safe. There are many websites available to support parents, e.g.

<https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/advice-centre/parents-and-carers> and we urge all parents to follow the advice given.

In the New Year, we will be inviting parents to an information evening on keeping young people safe with a focus on internet and phone use - more details to follow.

Cost of Meal Deal

For over a year, we have been able to hold off increasing the cost of the lunchtime meal deal but, due to the rising cost of ingredients, it is unfortunately necessary to raise the price from £2.30 to £2.50 from the beginning of January. Included in the deal is the main meal and either a dessert or a drink. When compared to the £3.65 charged by the same company at other schools, or the cost of a burger and chips from a fast food

¹ (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted/about>; <https://www.gov.uk/complain-about-school>).

outlet, we believe this continues to represent excellent value for money. Students who are entitled to free school meals will have their lunchtime allowance increased to £2.50 to cover the cost of the meal deal.

Student initiative – can you help?

A group of students is working on a project that combines celebrating the school's 20th anniversary with their passion for the environment. The team has identified a local supplier of reusable drinking bottles and are working with this company to finalise the product. To enable the school to be able to give every student a bottle free of charge, the team are looking for sponsors. Any company, organisation or individual that is interested in supporting our Young Enterprise team with this project should get in touch via feedback@mket.org.uk.

iPad trial

A number of textbook publishers have advised schools that in the not too distant future they will no longer be printing books but moving to digital platforms. This will have many educational benefits. It will enable publishers to: update content more frequently; include multimedia content such as animated diagrams and video clips; add interactive tasks to allow students to self-check their knowledge and understanding.

In preparation for this new way of working, Walton High is looking to trial the use of iPads to support students' learning in school and at home. The school could take two main approaches to the use of such devices:

1. Every student has their own device for use in school and at home
2. Walton High has class sets of iPads that teachers book for use during lessons only

In January, Walton High will be trialling the 1:1 use of iPads with a Year 8 class at our Brooklands Campus. A school that has successfully implemented students' 1:1 use of tablets is The de Ferrers School in Staffordshire. More details of how they use these devices and the benefits can be found on their website <https://www.deferrers.com/ipad>.

We would very much welcome feedback from parents on this initiative via a short online survey <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/M6KCJXZ>.

We will feedback the findings from the pilot by the end of the spring term.

Curriculum Review

The senior team is in the process of reviewing the curriculum offer for September 2020 and exploring the feasibility of reintroducing our Short Course/Learning Challenge programme, which used to run on Wednesday afternoons.

For those who have had children join Walton High since we stopped offering these, a Learning Challenge/Short Course is a programme that takes place one afternoon a week and lasts for five weeks. Some courses were compulsory and covered aspects of the PSHE/careers curriculum or other life skills such as First Aid, whilst others were optional. Some optional courses took place off-site, e.g. water sports, ice-skating, skiing. Whilst most of the courses were free of charge, some incurred a fee to cover the cost of using off-site facilities, specialist instructors and transport.

If we are able to reintroduce this aspect of our enriched curriculum in 2020, parents will be informed of developments and consulted on the range of courses/challenges offered early in the summer term.

Pressure on indoor social space on cold and wet days

With the recent inclement weather, both campuses are experiencing significant pressure on the limited indoor social space. Consequently, the senior team is exploring ways of alleviating the problem including reviewing the structure of the school day. If the school day does need amending, we will consult with parents before any changes are made. Any change would not come into effect before September 2020.

Uniform

The Dress Code is an important part of Walton High's ethos and underpins the school's culture of high expectations and good discipline. Parents are responsible for ensuring their sons and daughters leave for school wearing the correct attire that is clean and presentable. We would like to thank those parents who always ensure that this is the case.

As adolescents grow very quickly, and daily wear can take its toll, we should be grateful if parents would refresh or renew uniform items for the start of the new term so students return in January looking as smart as they did in September. Information on our Dress Code is found on the school's website

<https://www.waltonhigh.org.uk/uniform-guidelines>.

Building capacity and succession planning

In January 2020, Walton High will be advertising for a Principal, Head of School, for its Brooklands Campus to start in September. The successful candidate will work closely with Ms Alexander, who is based at the Walnut Tree campus. This post is to add capacity to the school's senior team, which has been carrying a number of vacancies for many years due to pressure on the school's finances brought about by year-on-year real term cuts to the school's budget.

For the immediate future, I will remain as the school's Executive Principal with overall responsibility for both sites but will gradually be withdrawing from the day-to-day leadership of Walton High to focus more on my role within Milton Keynes Education Trust.

As you can see, 2020 looks to be another exciting year at Walton High and we are all very much looking forward to continuing to work with parents to bring out the very best in our young people and to further enhance the quality of education they enjoy.

Finally, I should like to thank you for your continued support and wish you all a relaxing and enjoyable holiday and a happy New Year.

Kind regards



Michelle Currie
Executive Principal