

29th March 2019

Dear Parents/Carers,

Re: Parent Survey Questionnaire

Many thanks to all those of you who took the time to complete the questionnaire recently; at the time of writing, we have had 228 responses, providing us with a very good picture of parent views.

We have discussed the results in detail at a senior leadership meeting and will be sharing the key messages with all staff shortly.

The survey results showed that the vast majority of parents feel really positive about the school, which is supported by the evidence from recent parent forums and previous questionnaires. We are obviously pleased about this and it is lovely for staff to know that their efforts are appreciated.

Nevertheless, we remain committed to doing all we can to improving the quality of all-round education provided by the school and will not rest until every single parent is happy with what we are doing.

Below, you can read more on the results of the survey as well our response to the key points (especially those raised as areas for improvement). It will never be the case that we all agree on everything, but we hope at least that you can see we do listen to what everybody has to say.

Please also note that the next Parent Forum meeting will be on **Wednesday 1st May (6-7.30pm)** where all parents and carers are very welcome to come and meeting with myself, members of the senior leadership team and governors to discuss any issues arising from this survey – or indeed anything else that you wish to provide feedback on.

Kind regards



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PARENT SURVEY

RESPONSES TO CLOSED QUESTIONS

- Of the fourteen questions inviting an agree/disagree response, around 90% or more of parents gave positive responses to twelve of them – which is obviously very encouraging.
- This leaves two questions where responses were not as positive as elsewhere (on homework and information on progress – see next two points)
- On homework, ‘only’ 75% felt the amount of homework set is ‘about right’. However, very similar numbers said that students get too much homework (11%) to those who feel they don’t get enough (14%) Please see next section for more on this.
- Regarding the question on whether or not parents receive valuable information from the school on their child’s progress, 16% disagreed with the statement. See section on ‘areas for development’ on this.

POSITIVE COMMENTS

120 people chose to write something in the comments section at the end of the survey. There were lots of different points raised and many were very specific issues relating to individual children.

Whilst we have read and considered every single point, rather than reproduce and respond to all of them here, we have only mentioned those where three people or more made the similar points.

On the positive side, in order of points made most often, there were:

- Lots of comments of appreciation for the work done by Student Services and/or the quality of pastoral care generally
- Lots of comments about teachers and other members of the staff at the school being exceptionally committed/motivated/supportive
- Lots of comments about the extra-curricular opportunities provided by the school and our focus on the ‘whole child’ and not just academic performance
- Lots of positive comments about the general quality of teaching being high
- Lots of positive comments about the school having high standards/expectations – e.g. for behaviour and academic standards
- Several positive comments about staff/school responding quickly to queries
- Several comments about communication being good and/or much improved
- Several comments praising the school for our recent approach to the issue of drugs

AREAS FOR DEVELOPMENT

In terms of areas where we can improve, the points mentioned in the written comments by more than three parents were as follows:

POINT RAISED BY PARENTS & CARERS	SCHOOL RESPONSE
<p>Amount of homework set not being right.</p> <p>(N.b. In addition to the survey question on homework, four parents submitted written comments saying they do not think homework should be set over holidays)</p>	<p>As mentioned above, 75% felt the amount of homework set is 'about right' but this has to be set against the fact that similar numbers said that students get too much homework (11%) to those who feel they don't get enough (14%)</p> <p>Overall, it therefore seems reasonable to work on the basis that we are generally getting it about right as far as the great majority of parents are concerned – and we suspect the issue is one of consistency between teachers as much as anything. This is something Mrs Brennan (assistant headteacher in charge of quality of teaching and learning) is looking into.</p> <p>On the specific point relating specifically to homework over holidays, the main concern seemed to be the KS3 January assessments. We have therefore committed to moving these a bit later so that students do not need to spend time over Christmas revising.</p>
<p>Insufficient information received on progress being made by students.</p> <p>(N.b. there were 4-5 written comments to this effect as well)</p>	<p>As mentioned above, 16% parents disagreed with the statement that they receive valuable information about their child's progress. Obviously, this still means 84% did agree, but we aim for at least 90% positive responses in these surveys.</p> <p>Closer investigation shows those who disagreed to have been almost all parents of children in either Year 7 or Year 10. It is possible that this slightly less positive response is partly because the 2nd progress report for Year 10 had not been issued at the time of the survey.</p> <p>We have also uncovered an issue recently whereby some Year 7 parents have been slightly concerned because the links between KS2 SAT scores and Year 7 exam scores had not been clearly explained.</p> <p>For example, some children may have had an above average KS2 SAT scores but their marks in the recent Year 7 exams were a bit below average and parents were worried that their progress had gone backwards.</p>

However, this doesn't account for the fact that the overall profile of KS2 SAT scores for LHS students is above the national average to start with.

This is something we are going to address by providing a bit more information on the next set of Year 7 reports, which should allow parents to compare with progress at primary school more easily.

We will also be providing more details to allow parents to judge relative performance within the year group, and hope that this information will be useful.

School appears to care more about 'minor' issues like attendance, uniform or not having the correct equipment than 'more important' issues like learning.

Some parents also suggested we are too 'strict' in lessons and should be more 'relaxed'.

(approx. 6-7 comments in total)

Firstly, this needs to be balanced against the fact that at least as many parents commented that they like our high expectations.

Overall, we strongly believe that something the very best schools have in common is the fact that they aim for high standards in every area. The problem with allowing students to choose which rules they follow very quickly leads to a lowering of standards in other areas. It also leads to a constant arguments and debates over which rules are important enough to be enforced properly, which are 'minor' enough to be ignored and whether or not a child should be 'let off' for any given incident. We think it is far better to keep things simple, with everyone knowing where they stand, by insisting all rules are followed at all times (even if maintaining full consistency is always going to be difficult to achieve).

In short, keeping on top of more visible things like attendance, punctuality to lesson, equipment and uniform are so important precisely *because* they create the calm conditions to allow us to focus on learning.

Quality of teaching being inconsistent.

(4-5 comments)

This is, of course, a fair point. As with any profession, some people will always be better (and/or more experienced) at their job than others. It is the single biggest challenge for any school – especially one as large as ours – to ensure that every single teacher is always teaching at a level that students and parents are entitled to expect.

We do have an extensive programme of monitoring and quality assurance (many teachers would say too extensive!) and we invest a lot of time in training and supporting staff.

	<p>Various external reviews, including Ofsted, have confirmed that we have made significant improvements and that the overall quality is very good, but we are very open about the fact that this will always be a huge priority for us – as it ought to be for any school.</p>
<p>Can we introduce lockers for students to keep bags/coats in?</p> <p>(3 requests)</p>	<p>This has been discussed several times in the past. We do understand the request but, ultimately, we believe lockers will create at least as many problems as they would solve.</p> <p>They tend to take up a lot of space and, especially because we are a big site, experience shows that most students stop using them once the novelty wears off (they don't want to keep walking backwards and forwards to get things) and/or others use them as an excuse to be late for lessons.</p> <p>If students do need to carry especially large/heavy items (e.g. musical instruments) then please contact your tutor or Student Services – suitable arrangements can usually be made.</p>
<p>Concerns about the number of lessons taught by supply teachers and/or teachers have changed during the year.</p> <p>(3-4 comments)</p>	<p>We monitor this very carefully and can categorically assure you that our absence rates are low compared to other schools, as is our turnover of staff.</p> <p>Lymm High School is seen as a very desirable place to work now: we almost always get strong fields for vacant posts – even though there is a crisis in teacher recruitment nationally – and staff well-being surveys and exit interviews are extremely positive.</p> <p>Overall, we face far fewer challenges in terms of staff absence than most other schools. Of course, there are always good reasons for absences – e.g. maternity covers, school trips, illness or leaving for promotions or relocations.</p> <p>This means that there will inevitably be occasions when certain students might have a few of their teachers affected at the same time, which can create the impression of a school-wide problem when there isn't actually one. We understand why this can cause anxiety, but hope most parents understand that it is unavoidable.</p>

Communication not always being consistent.

(3 comments)

Please see comments in response to the parent forum in October [here](#). In addition to that, we will soon be introducing a new system for communicating information relating to sport which we hope will make a big difference.

We will never be complacent about this, but hope you will permit us a brief smile here, because this is the first parent survey we have ever done where more parents have commented positively about communication than negatively!

To have over 90% of you agreeing that the school 'generally communicates well with parents' is really pleasing because a couple of years ago the need to improve communication was the single most common complaint we faced.

Comments about the scholars programme – asking for it to be more 'transparent' or querying why selection is only based on SAT scores.

(3-4 comments)

Whilst we do ask students and parents involved to be sensitive about the scholars programme, there is certainly no intention to be secretive about it.

Selection is based on KS2 performance in English and Maths, combined with scores from the Year 7 January exams. We appreciate that any selection criteria will necessarily be somewhat arbitrary but ask for understanding that any changes to the criteria would simply mean a slightly different cohort being selected.

There are opportunities for students to join the scholars programme at later points (indeed, several have been invited to do this) if their exam scores demonstrate unequivocally that they are outperforming others already on the programme.

Three parents said they had emailed a member of staff but never had a response.

This is disappointing and we do encourage you to get in touch if this happens for any reason.

Assuming you have given the member of staff a few days to respond, contacting your head of year is probably the best way forward.

If it is the head of year who hasn't responded, please contact Mrs Headon.

Comments suggesting that achievement points are not always awarded consistently

(4-5 comments)

Again, this is a very fair point and will always be a challenge for a school with as many teachers as we have.

We like to think things have improved generally in this regard and we will certainly keep battling away.

In fact, we are in the middle of making some changes to our internal systems for recording information that we hope will help further.

4-5 of comments suggestion behaviour at social times could be better or that there is some low-level bullying that is not being addressed.

(n.b. most of these seemed to be related to very specific cases)

We are a large school (nearly 1900 students) and so, of course, we get the odd incident of poor behaviour and/or young people not treating one another properly.

We take all of these incidents very seriously and the fact that the most common point made by parents in this survey was that Student Services and the pastoral team deal exceptionally well with such issues suggest we do a very good job overall.

This is backed up by the regular student voice exercises we do. It is also a fact that, without exception, every education professional who has visited the school in the last 2-3 years (including Ofsted) has said that the behaviour of our students is absolutely outstanding.

However, even though they are relatively rare, we fully understand that if your child has been on the wrong end of such an incident, you will be upset and we must do all we can to support you.

If your child does experience any issue of this sort, then please make sure you let us know immediately and we will do everything we can to deal with it.

Thank you again to everyone who took the time to respond to the parent survey!