

May 2019

Dear parents and carers

Thank you very much to those of you who came along to the recent Parent Forum meeting; as ever, it was really useful to have the opportunity to talk to you in more detail about how things in school are going from your perspective. I haven't prepared a detailed written response to the points raised on the evening because the vast majority of points came up in the parent survey last term ([click here to read my response to that](#)) and so there would not be a great deal new to say. Please do be assured, though, that we took on board all the points raised and have considered them as a senior leadership team.

However, there is one issue that was discussed on the evening that those present felt needs addressing; that is, the use of private tutors. Discussions at the parent forum confirmed what we thought, which is that there seems to be a growing number of parents paying for additional private tuition for their children and that some parents are feeling pressure to do the same for fear their child might be 'left behind'. As a school, we have a few concerns about this and I'd like to put these on record.

Firstly, I should say that it would be silly to say that private tuition can *never* be helpful. Similarly, I do not want to adopt an overly defensive position of claiming that Lymm High School is so wonderful that none of our students could ever possibly benefit from additional tuition – no school could say such a thing honestly, however much you might expect us to take such a position.

Having said that, we are a little concerned that some families are spending a lot of money on private tuition that is having little or no discernible benefit. This is for the following reasons:

- The quality of private tuition varies hugely. There are certainly some very good tutors out there, but there are also many who are not. Unless a tutor is very good, they are unlikely to add any value to that which is being taught in school.
- At Lymm High School, we encourage teachers to undertake marking for the exam boards and we have at least one or two colleagues doing this in almost every subject. These colleagues share what they learn from this process so that we can be sure every student is given the most up to date advice. This is far less common among tutors, who sometimes are giving advice that is out of date – and/or advice that is so generic that it is not actually very helpful in practice. If you are going to engage tutors, we would suggest that one of the key questions you ask first is whether or not they are currently teaching the *same specification and exam board* in a secondary school and/or whether they *currently* mark papers for the exam board we use in school. This is especially true for arts and humanities subjects, where content and exam technique can vary widely between different exam boards.
- We are seeing a growing number of situations where students are telling their teachers that 'my tutor has told me something different'. At best, this is confusing for students but, in some cases, tuition is actively *harming* students' progress – because the advice from the tutor is unlikely to be more accurate than that which is given in school. On occasions, we have even had to contact tutors to ask them to stop saying or

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doing certain things. If you come across such a conflict, please stress to your child that it is the school they should listen to - and please contact the head of department in school if you have any concerns.

- Perhaps the most important point of all is that **tutors are absolutely no substitute whatsoever for hard work or proper revision**. The truth is that there is relatively little a tutor can do to ensure material 'sticks' in the mind of a student. Some students might find it reassuring, but the time spent with a tutor may well have been better spent on working hard in lessons and at home to understand and revise the material in the first place. Where students are genuinely confused about a topic (as opposed to just not having learnt it) then teachers at school are always willing to help out in lessons, or to find time at lunchtime to go through it: you should not need to pay for that privilege. We worry about those students who might be below target but just say: "It'll be ok, I've got a tutor" - in many cases, this seems to be discouraging them from working as hard as they need to. Similarly, it concerns us to hear of students going along, for example, for private sessions in fairly large groups that are essentially composed of the same classmates that they have 4-5 hours a week of lessons with anyway. Parents can best help here by ensuring students complete homework properly and using revision packs and knowledge organisers to quiz children repeatedly to help ensure the information does 'stick'.
- We already run a lot of additional interventions and revision sessions in school, especially in Year 11. If students go to all of these, and do what their teachers ask in terms of revision, then they shouldn't need a tutor as well.

The points above have been written with GCSE and A' level students in mind. However, I was alarmed to learn that some parents have felt they needed to seek private tuition in the run up to school key stage 3 exams. It is very difficult to see how this will make any tangible difference to a student's progress in the long-term, and there is a danger such practice leads to students becoming unnecessarily worried or stressed about their performance before they even get to GCSE. It is one thing to try to find a way of picking up a few extra marks in a GCSE or A' level exam through a little extra revision or refining of exam technique, but quite another to start putting an intense focus on maximising performance in KS3 exams that don't have any external value. Academic progress is vitally important; I would never say otherwise and, indeed, one of my most important priorities since joining the school has been to put more emphasis on this. However, we all need to be careful to get the right balance here.

In short, what we are saying is that private tuition can be seductive – students can enjoy it and parents can feel they ought to pay for it when they see others doing so – but that it does not always make any real difference to a student's progress in the end. If people are using private tuition to help prepare for GCSE and A' level exams, then it is essential that this does not become a substitute for the hard work and revision that are necessary to excel.

As ever, if you are concerned about your child's progress in a particular subject, please do contact the class teacher and/or their head of department – or the head of year if the concerns go across several subjects. Otherwise, I hope this letter provides some useful advice and some reassurance to those of you feeling pressure to pay for extra tuition simply because others are.

Kind regards



Gwyn Williams
Headteacher