

PARENT FORUM | NOVEMBER 2019

Thank you very much to those parents and carers who gave up their time to attend the parent forum; as always, it was very useful to hear your feedback and this will certainly help us to improve provision for all students.

Some of the things that were mentioned as positives about the school included:

- Teachers being very generous with their time when replying to parents and generally being very approachable
- The pastoral care available – especially via Student Services
- High standards in terms of behaviour and academic expectations
- Provision for extra-curricular music
- Food technology lessons (i.e. the wide range of dishes that students learn to cook) and extra-curricular activities such as Masterchef and Bake Off.
- Wide range of extra-curricular activities more generally
- The work that has been done over the past 12 months to increase the profile of girls' sport – for example, the Women in Sport initiative in the summer term
- Events on risky behaviours (drugs and social media) supported by Warrington Youth Service
- The range of food in the canteen
- The Duke of Edinburgh programme and the support students engaged in this receive
- Communication has been much improved in recent year – e.g. use of Show My Homework, the Gateway App, the re-shaped parent bulletins and newsletters

After sharing ideas in smaller groups, we came together for a plenary session and spent most of our time discussing two issues that we thought would be worth sharing with all parents and carers.

The first was the **canteen**, with concerns about the length of time spent queuing for hot food, some issues with younger students getting bumped and jostled in the queues and the fact that all this is putting some students off going to the canteen at all. This is particularly true on Friday (chip day!) when the main queue is at its busiest. In addition, some concerns were raised about lack of space to sit and eat properly.

These are all legitimate concerns and we were very aware of them already. Indeed, as it happens, we had been discussing the canteen for quite some time at senior leadership level on the same day of the parent forum.

Various potential solutions were discussed at the parent forum, nearly all of which have already been considered (and, in many cases trialled) at various points over the past few years, but unfortunately the underlying problem is that our canteen is not really big enough for the size of the school. We were very pleased to secure some money to build the new canopy recently, which has helped but, without a significant (and expensive) new build, it will always be something that is hard to manage. We have tried, and will keep trying to secure government funding but the reality is that we are very unlikely to be successful any time soon.

That said, we are urgently reviewing the situation as regards more staffing to manage the queues and the possibility of opening up one or two more serving points to try to reduce queue lengths on the busiest days. We expect to be able to make some of these changes within the next few days and are confident there will be an improvement as a result.

We also had a really interesting discussion about the **Key Stage Three curriculum**. Differing views were expressed, with some parents a little concerned that the demands on some of the younger students are too

high whilst others were very happy that academic expectations have risen. For example, parents with students in different year groups have really noticed an increase in the level of challenge in English lessons.

From our point of view, we are really pleased to hear that students and parents have noticed an increase in rigour and expectations. There has long been a nationally recognised phenomenon whereby students experience a 'dip' in expectations and performance in the first couple of years of secondary school compared to some of what they were doing in Year 6. This is something we have worked very hard to address and, in this sense, it is great to hear that people feel there is now a tangible 'step up' when students arrive at Lymm High School. This perception was fully endorsed a couple of weeks ago when we had a two-day review conducted by an experienced Ofsted inspector; she commented extremely favourably on the levels of challenge and expectations in KS3 lessons and the fact that our students are clearly rising to this challenge. There can be no question that higher expectations of what our students are capable of was a key factor behind our outstanding exam results this summer.

On the other hand, we absolutely recognise that the balance has to be right and that students are properly supported where they are struggling to cope. A good deal of work is going on at the moment to make sure that lessons are sufficiently flexible to allow for this. At the same time, it is essential that we do not put too much pressure on young people and this is something we are always very conscious of. As always, we need parents support in helping us get across the message that it is important to study hard, but that there are plenty of other things in life that are important too.

A specific point that came up was time spent on homework; please bear in mind that, if your child has genuinely spent the required amount of time on a homework (i.e. they really have concentrated on it and not just spent most of their time checking their phone!) but struggled to finish it then it is perfectly acceptable to advise them to stop working and for you to write a brief note of explanation to the teacher.

Knowledge organisers were discussed alongside all of this. On the whole, they are working extremely well as a tool for helping students to consolidate key knowledge. Perhaps inevitably, the number of knowledge organisers and the level of detail on some of them has felt a little overwhelming for some students at first – especially younger ones. What we are finding in school is that students are quickly getting used to them and, the more they use them, the more they appreciate how useful they can be in helping them to learn. The more confident students become in the basic knowledge, the more progress they tend to make and the more they enjoy their studies.

Incidentally, absolutely none of this should mean any 'creativity' is lost; quite the opposite. For example, it was only by having such a secure grasp of the basics of physics that Einstein was able to come up with his brilliant insights, in the same way that we would never have heard of Shakespeare had he not such a strong knowledge of literature and history. We are also especially proud of the curriculum we offer at Lymm High School, which contains a good deal of emphasis on the creative, visual and performing arts – not to mention all the extra-curricular opportunities in these areas. Many schools have been forced to cut provision in these subjects because they are relatively more expensive to run, but we believe so strongly in the value of a broad and balanced curriculum that we have done all we can to avoid this.

Once again, many thanks to those of you who came along to the parent forum. Whilst we haven't covered every point mentioned here, please be reassured that we did listen to them all on the evening and will take everything into account.

Kind regards

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