

## Parents and carers survey, March 2022

Dear parents and carers

Thank you so much to everyone who took the time to respond to the recent survey. Well over 700 of you completed it, which is a fantastic response rate and has been very useful in giving us a clear picture of people's opinions and feelings about the school at the moment. As we'd expect, there are lots of different individual perspectives, but the following summarises the key messages that emerge from the survey.

### **Positives**

The overall results are extremely positive. In fact, given the challenges of the past couple of years and the barriers we have all faced in terms of trying to maintain a sense of normality and positivity, we are delighted to see that the vast, vast majority of you clearly feel Lymm High School is the right place for your children and that you feel we are doing a very good job. We really appreciate the hundreds of lovely comments, not just because they are nice to read and help to motivate staff but also because they will also help us build on the things you feel we do well.

There were lots of other positives mentioned, but the most common themes in terms of what you are saying we do especially well include:

- The quality of pastoral support available for students when they need it and the care that the pastoral team have for children in the school – in particular from Student Services and heads of year
- The responsiveness of the school, including from the vast majority of individual teachers, when you contact us with questions or concerns
- High academic standards and teachers who generally expect a lot of students
- Quality of teaching generally
- The range of extra-curricular activities available
- A good balance between focus on academic excellence alongside extra-curricular provision
- Teachers who are supportive, kind and encouraging and who know students as individuals
- Knowledge organisers – especially the new format we have been trialling with Year 8
- The response of the school to Covid – e.g. getting online lessons up and running quickly, maintaining a normal timetable throughout and managing to keep as many extra-curricular activities as possible going when restrictions allowed
- Communication – e.g. the newsletters and bulletins, SMHW/Satchel One as well as other messages during the pandemic
- Support available for mental health
- Finally, the move to online parents' evenings seems to have gone down well with lots of you

**Key areas for development / suggestions for improvement**

There were also plenty of suggestions for improvement, the vast majority of which were made in a very constructive way. The senior leadership team have read every single response very carefully and spent a good deal of time discussing them. What follows is a brief summary of the key themes (i.e. those mentioned by more than 3–4 parents/carers) and our initial response to the points raised. If an issue you raised isn't here, it will be because not many others raised it – but please know that we will have read it and considered it.

Theme	Response
Trips	<p>Many of you are keen to get as many trips going again as soon as possible and pointing out that Year 7 and 8 haven't been able to visit Tynny yet. We absolutely agree! We have been desperate to get back to running all the trips we used to run pre-pandemic. There will be a bit of a 'lag' with this because most trips have to be booked and planned quite a long time in advance and obviously we weren't able to do this in many cases because of the lack of certainty around Covid rules. In fact, we have already had quite a few trips in the last few weeks and we are in the process of planning plenty more.</p> <p>As regards Tynny, the picture is very similar and we are very conscious that Years 7 and 8 haven't had the chance to go. We cannot promise anything at the moment because a lot of work needs doing in order to re-open Tynny safely after the length of time it has had to be closed. However, we are working hard to make sure these year groups can have a residential trip either in the summer term or early next year. With luck, we'll be able to provide more news soon.</p>
Canteen – availability of food and length of queues	<p>It has long been the case that students need to queue for a while to get lunch and this isn't ideal but, unfortunately, the physical restrictions of our site mean that the options available to us are limited. Some people have suggested a split lunchtime (something we were actually doing last year because of year group Covid 'bubbles') but this just causes various other problems such as not being able to run as many clubs at lunchtime and lessons being disrupted by the noise of children on lunchtime. We have worked hard in recent years to improve queuing systems/staffing, including adding extra serving points, and it has made a difference but I'm afraid that solving the challenges in this area would require significant investment from the government of several million pounds, which is unlikely to be forthcoming at the moment. For the time being, the truth is this is something we will have to live with.</p> <p>That said, with the possible exception of the odd Fridays (chip day!) there is more than enough time for students to queue and eat. In practice, the queues are usually entirely gone after about 30 minutes of lunchtime and often sooner... so, especially if students wait a little and join queues later on during lunchtime, they probably won't need to queue for more than a few minutes.</p>

	<p>Please also note that we never ‘run out of food’, which we know is something some students come home and say sometimes! We may run out of certain items on occasions towards the end of lunchtime (quite rarely in reality) but there is always food available, even if it may not necessarily always be each child’s first choice.</p> <p>It might also be worth saying that there is generally a lot more variety of food – including hot, healthy freshly cooked meals and vegetarian options – than some children tend to report home (typically when they are trying to explain to their parents why they have chosen chicken burgers yet again!!) Please <a href="#">click here</a> to see the current menu.</p>
<p>Extra-curricular sport</p>	<p>There was plenty of praise for the PE department in the survey, with many of you recognising that they have managed to keep a lot more sport running throughout the pandemic than most schools. Indeed, we’ve managed to organise over 200 fixtures against other schools so far this year, which we are delighted with under the circumstances. At the same time, a few of you have suggested that it has been a little haphazard at times, with some events being cancelled at short notice and maybe not as many teams running in some sports as usual. We do accept this up to a point and hope people understand that it has largely been down to staff absence (primarily as a result of Covid). The other reason is that a lot of other schools have not wanted to play fixtures because of their own interpretation of the Covid situation so we have had to work especially hard to organise all these fixtures. Things have been easier since Christmas though, and should continue to get easier.</p>
<p>Lockers</p>	<p>Every year we have a few parents (typically Year 7) asking for lockers and we do understand why. However, we have had further discussions again recently on this, including with the PTA, and remain of the view that they just wouldn’t work very well in our school. It is such a large site and the experience that many of us have working in other schools (even ones much smaller than LHS) is that students most often stop using lockers quite quickly because they can’t be bothered walking to and from them all the time.</p> <p>Please do remember, though, that the music department will keep hold of large instruments and it is possible to leave large PE bags etc in Student Services.</p>
<p>Chances for parents to visit school</p>	<p>A number of Year 7 and 8 parents/carers commented that they haven’t had the chance to visit the school yet because of Covid restrictions. This is something we are very conscious of and, as it happens, had been discussing in the week prior to putting the survey out. Because of exams it will likely need to be the summer term, but we are hoping to run some events, including some open days where you can come and walk around during the school day to see what things look like in action.</p>
<p>SEND students</p>	<p>The responses on support for students with SEND varied. There were lots of lovely comments of appreciation and the vast majority agreed with the statement that their child is being given the support needed to succeed. At the same time, a small number expressed</p>

	<p>a feeling that students have not always been fully supported or that not everyone has always understood their particular needs. Most of these were quite individualised and it was hard to identify a pattern but please be assured that we have read all these comments carefully and will take account of them. One thing it might be worth saying is that we are in the process of appointing an Assistant SENDCo to support Miss Yates as SENDCo, as well as increasing capacity in one or two other SEND-related areas. We will also soon be undertaking some more detailed parent voice on SEND to make sure we have a full picture in helping us to evaluate provision and do all we can to keep improving things.</p> <p>One view that was expressed by a handful of parents/carers was that we don't take sufficient account of the needs of neuro-diverse (e.g. those with ADHD or ASD) students when it comes to behaviour. There was a suggestion from some that sanctions are inappropriate for such students or that we need to allow them a lot more leeway than we do. Obviously, each case is an individual one but our general view here is that we already (quite rightly) make a lot of reasonable adjustments where there is a diagnosed condition and we are always eager to work with young people and their families to help them cope with the school environment. At the same time, we rely on everyone's understanding that we are still a mainstream school and we cannot operate in a world where there are little or no boundaries or consequences for certain behaviours, especially when these behaviours impact on other students. Apart from anything else, we would be doing the individuals themselves no favours in the long-term if we adopted such an approach. As ever though, please contact us directly if you have concerns and we will be happy to listen and discuss them with you.</p>
Behaviour	<p>As is usually the case, we had a range of responses on behaviour. Quite a few suggested that we are too strict and a few others that we aren't strict enough! Interestingly, nearly all of these comments seemed to apply to social times rather than lesson times.</p> <p>What is clear is that most people realise that behaviour is generally excellent at Lymm High School (and it certainly remains the case that virtually anyone who visits the school during the day comments on how fantastic our students are and how well-behaved they are). We will never apologise for having high standards, even if some students grumble that they have been hard done by on occasions (bearing in mind that nobody ever gets a detention when they <i>are</i> following the school rules!).</p> <p>On the other hand, for the small number of you who feel there is too much silly behaviour at lunchtime, it probably is the case this year that the impact of lockdown has meant a few more children than usual have needed some guidance in managing themselves properly – something that is being echoed by virtually every other headteacher I speak to at the moment. At the same time, it really is only a small number and, to be fair, most of these children are responding well to this support by now. Please rest assured that we have around 20 members of staff on duty around site during break and lunchtime to ensure students are well-supervised.</p>

Parents' evenings	Lots of you commented on how much better you find the online parents' evenings and so we will be sticking with them. There were also dozens of appreciative comments about teachers during these evenings. Understandably, a few people said that 4 minutes isn't always enough when there is a subject you are especially concerned about. This is always a challenge, whether online or in-person, because some teachers simply teach too many students to fit everyone in as it is and the longer the appointment times, the fewer slots are available. Please do bear in mind though that most teachers are perfectly happy to give you a call at another time if it's especially important.
Contacting school	<p>We know it's not always crystal clear who the best person to contact is if you have an issue, and our advice is always just to contact <i>someone</i>! Main reception or Student Services are always good places to start: even if you don't get quite the right person, they will point you in the right direction. Please also note that, if you don't get a response within two working days, we encourage you to try again or to try someone else. There were so many positive comments in the survey about how responsive staff are and we pride ourselves on this but, with the best will in the world, the odd email will go to junk mail or maybe even get missed amidst everything else – if that does happen, please do try again! If necessary, feel free to contact me directly.</p> <p>Please also remember that we do not monitor the parent-run Facebook pages or ever respond to anything posted on there. Our advice is always to contact school directly if you have any concerns and to be very wary of paying too much attention to some of the rumours that seem to go around on social media (or even amongst students) from time to time! For example, it seems from a few of the survey responses that there were some rather outlandish claims going around about an incident last term whereby some students from another school briefly came onto site to speak to one of their friends. My general rule is not to get drawn into commenting on every rumour that circulates on Facebook and I won't break that rule here, but I do hope most of you trust us enough to know that I would obviously contact parents and carers about anything like this if there was anything we were actually worried about.</p>

### **Conclusion**

Many thanks again to all of you who replied. As always, it has been a genuinely useful exercise for us and, as ever, I was struck by how sensible and constructive most Lymm High parents and carers are. As we start to emerge from the Covid pandemic, we are desperate to keep moving the school forwards and the survey results will certainly be one of the tools we use to help us to do that.

Kind regards

Gwyn Williams