

Hele's School

A great place to learn. A great place to grow.



Friday, 14 January 2022

Dear Parent/Carer,

One of the things I adore about my job is meeting our young people and having quality time to talk to them and find out what it is really like to be Hele's School student. You may recall that our pledge this academic year is to hold a 10-minute meeting with every young person in the school - all 1350 of them - to find out about each individual experience of school, to find out what is going well and to gather feedback on what we can do to improve the student experience. It is also a fantastic opportunity to hear about things that students may engage in beyond the school day to learn more about each person 'in the round'.

This week, I have had the absolute pleasure of holding individual meetings with 30 children in Year 7 to kick start this term's spotlight on Year 7, and it has been wonderful to discover passions and talents that would otherwise remain hidden - including a boy who trains in gymnastics 5 days a week and has a burning aspiration to compete at the British Championships, and a girl who works on her portfolio every night, such is her passion for art, and who has ambitions to become a professional photographer. Whilst we still have the majority of Year 7 to meet, early indications are that students feel safe, settled, supported and happy at Hele's and value the quality of teaching and the broader experiences on offer.

On Wednesday at my Leadership Team meeting, we analysed the 207 Year 8 responses (86% of the cohort) from Term 2. There were many strengths of the school highlighted, but the most common comments were about the high standard of teaching, the approachability and friendliness of all staff, and strong support mechanisms, as well as good facilities and a nice environment. A couple of my favourite quotes include:

'We work together – we work as a team and everyone helps each other, students and teachers and staff together'.

'I can be whoever I want, and lots of interests are supported'.

'The school focuses on kindness and making sure people are kind.'

The areas emerging for further attention were predominantly around feeling challenged, stressed or worried about homework pressures and exams. This, perhaps, is no surprise given the disrupted education caused by the pandemic over the past 20 months and the fact that Year 8 would not have done their Y6 SATS so will have little experience of formal tests. Our expectations may be unfamiliar and appear scary to some, therefore. There is definitely a job for us to do to prepare our young people for the experience of assessments, but also to offer reassurance that it is ok and indeed healthy and normal to feel a degree of stress and being out of your comfort zone when learning. We just need to make sure the balance is right between doing things with adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers and doing things without assistance- the balance between challenge and support called the Zone of Proximity.

More trips and better access to sports equipment for use in social time also featured, which are relatively easy to act on.

The process following any round of student voice interviews includes a full analysis of responses to gather headlines of what is going well and what we could do to make the student experience even better, assemblies to focus on *'you said, we did'* for each year group, so students can see what changes they have brought about, and the pastoral team scrutinising responses to identify students who may need extra support.

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WESTCOUNTRY
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Upcoming events: Looking ahead to next week's calendared events:

- Year 9 Humanutopia: Tuesday 18 and Wednesday 19 January (during the school day) – following the hugely successful 'Who Am I?' day back in September for the whole of the Y9 cohort, next week sees 50 of our Y9 students train to be 'Heroes' and learn to share their newly acquired skills with a younger audience. On Wednesday, they will welcome the whole Y5 cohort from Woodford Primary School to Hele's to take part in our 5Live event.
- Year 12/13 Subject Parents Evening via MS Teams: Thursday, 20 January, 4 - 7pm. A reminder to please click on the link on the Hele's School website (under the 'Parents' tab) or alternatively visit <https://heles.parentseveningsystem.co.uk> to book your appointments. If you do not have access to the Internet, please contact the School Reception and staff will be happy to add appointments on your behalf.

School Show: If you haven't yet done so, please do secure your tickets for 'Legally Blonde', which promises to be 'totally awesome'! The whole school production runs from Monday 14 February to Friday 18 February inclusive. Tickets are being snapped up at a phenomenal rate, so please don't wait too long to get yours or risk being disappointed. Our wonderful cast, crew, band and staff are stepping up rehearsals over the coming weeks as countdown to showtime kicks in. I know you'll want to support and celebrate the tremendous work and commitment that the whole team has put into preparing for this show.

Pupil Premium: Earlier in the year, I included some information in the weekly Bulletin about the 'Pupil Premium' - additional funding given to schools for those children in receipt of Free School Meals. Money is provided to school for children who receive Free School Meals both now, but also those who have received them at any time in the last 6 years. With the Pupil Premium, we are able to offer families financial support with items such as uniform, music lessons and extra-curricular activities through a £150 personal allowance, as well as providing essentials such as revision guides and ingredients/materials for practical lessons. In addition, we also use the money to offer a range of pastoral and academic opportunities for the students involved. If your financial circumstances have changed and you feel your child may be eligible for Free School Meals, please visit the government website for the criteria: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals> or contact School Reception where we will be able to talk you through it all. There is more detailed information, including our 3-year Pupil Premium and Catch Up Plan on our school website: <https://www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk/pupilpremium>.

Changes to the self-isolation period for those who test positive for COVID-19: From Monday 17 January, people who are self-isolating with COVID-19 will have the option to reduce their isolation period after 5 full days if they test negative with a lateral flow device test on both day 5 and day 6 and they do not have a temperature. For example, if they test negative on the morning of day 5 and the morning of day 6, they can return to their education or childcare setting immediately on day 6. The first test must be taken no earlier than day 5 of the self-isolation period, and the second must be taken the following day. All test results should be reported to NHS Test and Trace. If the result of either of their tests is positive, they should continue to self-isolate until they get negative results from two LFD tests on consecutive days or until they have completed 10 full days of self-isolation, whichever is earliest.

Rotary Club Support: A huge thank you to the Rotary Clubs of Ivybridge and Saltram, the Beresford Jones Trust and other organisations and individuals for the grants and donations that supported so many young people across our locality with securing access to devices to support home learning during remote provision. Fundraising achieved £48,000 in total, which enabled the refurbishment of donated devices and the purchase of new devices. Links with 23 local primary and 12 secondary schools, including Hele's School, have seen 346 laptops and tablets being provided to support local children. I'd like to take this opportunity to publicly acknowledge the support of the Rotary and we look forward to continuing strong links with them to support our school and wider community.

Finally: Best of luck to the team of students and staff who are heading to the hills of Dartmoor this weekend for the first Ten Tors training session for the 35-mile team. It's forecast to be very cold but largely dry this weekend, so I hope they wrap up warm!

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason
Principal