

6 September 2017

Dear Parent or Carer

I wrote to many of you in July, prior to taking up post as Headteacher of Framwellgate School Durham, and met many of you as parents of students who are joining us this year. This is my first official letter to you all in post and, as I said to you in the summer, I am delighted to be here and am looking forward to the challenge.

I would like to share some thoughts with you as the term starts and outline some of the changes being introduced. As most of you are aware, our previous Ofsted report in November 2015, designated the school as "Requiring Improvement". This judgement was probably fair and exam results in particular need to continue to improve, but there are many positives about the school such as the care and support students receive and the commitment and dedication of the staff. We believe the school will make further rapid improvements this year and I am sure you will recognise and appreciate these.

One thing which struck me about the students I met and observed at Framwellgate School Durham, before taking up post, was their attitude. They are students with real character, ability and potential and I want them to enjoy school, to learn and to achieve highly. Although we expect basic rules to be followed, I want their learning to be fun and I want them to engage in every aspect of school life; in arts and sport and the huge number of trips and visits which take place.

Infrastructure

We have (almost) completed work on a new Sports Centre which will be available for students to use from next week. This is a wonderful facility complete with main hall, a fantastic climbing wall, classrooms and changing space, and a fitness room. We have also spent the summer installing a new, state-of-the-art £100,000+ computer system which replaces the one which caused so much disruption last year. We will have a new website soon (www.framdurham.com); please be patient with us as we work on the design and content. I anticipate this coming on-line in a matter of weeks.

Expectations of Students

I want the students of Framwellgate School Durham to be the best that they can be and to have very high expectations of themselves. I believe that getting the basics right, accomplishing small tasks well and always trying to improve, will be the keys to success. It is for this reason that I put so much emphasis on students getting the small details correct; attending every day; wearing the correct uniform and behaving well.

I have spoken to all the students in Years 7-10 and Year 12 today, and will meet the others tomorrow. Their STEP tutors, Heads of Year and teachers have also spoken to them and have outlined some of the other changes we have introduced. I have provided a brief summary below:

Changes to rules, procedures and systems

- Mobile phones must no longer be used on site during the school day. They must be switched off and kept in bags or they will be confiscated until the end of the day. This is primarily for safeguarding reasons; camera phones, access to social media and the ability to text can all lead to bullying. Should a student repeatedly have his/her phone confiscated, parents may be asked to come in to collect it.
- Although the uniform policy remains unchanged, we will be enforcing the policy; students who do not attend in the correct uniform will not be taught in their normal classes until the problem has been rectified. A friendly warning will be issued in the first two or three days of term and parents will be contacted, before the procedure operates fully. Please note the requirements that coloured nail varnish and unnatural hair colours are not allowed. Shoes, trousers and skirts must be appropriate as outlined in the policy.

- A new three stage behaviour system will operate in every lesson. Behaviour is generally excellent in the school but this system will ensure a degree of consistency and fairness in how students are treated. When instances of low level disruption occur (talking unnecessarily, distracting others, answering back, for example), a friendly warning will be issued. If this behaviour persists in the lesson, a final warning will be issued. Students therefore have two opportunities to make the right choice about their behaviour in lessons. If there is a third occurrence, students will be removed from the lesson and will work elsewhere under supervision. They will also be subject to an automatic 30-minute detention the following evening at 3pm (2.30pm on Wednesdays) under the supervision of me or my senior colleagues.

I must stress that **these procedures are common-place in most schools and certainly almost all the high performing schools that I know**. The vast majority of students will not have any issues or problems meeting these new requirements. We will always endeavour to ensure that students are treated with courtesy and respect when these rules are applied, but they will be applied.

Further changes which you and/or your child will notice are:

- A change to the timing of the day. This has been well-explained and you should all be aware of the changes. It is very important that students are punctual in the morning, particularly because lessons now begin at 8.30am (a warning bell will sound at 8.25am and students should move to lessons)
- New exercise books; there are bespoke exercise books for each subject so students should look after these and always work as neatly as they can.
- New approaches to teaching, learning and marking. Teachers now have 90 minutes of staff training per week outside the normal school day and this will have a direct impact on the quality of teaching in lessons.

We will spend the first few weeks of the term embedding our new systems and procedures but further changes which will have an impact on the quality of teaching, learning, support, advice and guidance will be introduced throughout the year.

Social Media

This is a request for parents. Although the school uses social media to communicate with parents and students, I am well aware that it can be misused (one reason we have stopped students using their phones at school). I am always concerned when rumours or gossip about the school take place on Facebook and other forums. May I politely request that you don't engage in this. Rest assured that if there is an announcement about the school which needs to be made, my staff or I will contact you directly or via our website. This should be the only reliable source of information about us. If you are concerned about any aspect of your child's education I would invite you to contact the appropriate person at the school directly. If unfounded comments are made about the school or my staff on social media I will take steps to contact the social media operators or take further legal advice.

Targets

Our students are amongst the most able in the North-East. Their ability profile at KS2 is as good as or better than any other school in Durham or the region. I met with staff on Monday and discussed our ambitious targets for our students this year. Please be assured that we will work tirelessly to support our students and help them to achieve the results they need to progress to the top universities and colleges, and onto high quality apprenticeships and work-based training. The hard work starts now and we are excited to get started.

Yours sincerely



Andy Byers
Headteacher