



Dear Parents/Carers

### **We need your help**

Our students typically respect staff, each other and the environment and fortunately vandalism across our school site is rare. Litter is much reduced – although not perfect – seagulls still visit! We are waiting for the outcome of a recent grant bid for new roofs and windows in the old house bases to improve the conditions – we are very optimistic.

However, we really need your help with a couple of challenges: **student toilets & mobile phones**.

**Toilets:** We have tried to get funding for a complete overhaul but no joy. It would cost in the region of £500,000 because of building complications. They are cleaned and checked through the day and are fully functional, unless damaged. Hatfield and Osborne toilets are open breaks & lunches.

We are aware that some students try to avoid the toilets completely during the school day, which is far from ideal. However, we have other students who seem to be obsessed with them.

Some schools take a much harder line, we try to take a reasonable approach.

- Hatfield toilets are always open except for three 10-minute slots – start of period 1, start of period 3 and start of period 5. At start of period 2 and 4 there is a member of staff on duty as it is also break and lunch for some students.
- Students are not allowed to go to the toilets between lessons as too many go in big groups, gather in the loos for a chat, and are then all late for lessons.
- We encourage students to go during their breaks and lunches as teaching staff do.
- During lessons, if students need the toilet, they are given a toilet pass and have to *leave their phone on the teacher's desk*. Only one student at a time can go.
- A few students with medical issues have toilet passes; there is always a toilet for them.

### **Toilet Troubles**

The issues we do have are as follows:

- Pre-arranging to meet with friends during lessons in the toilets – *typically on their mobile phones*. Then wasting learning time.
- Groups of students gather in toilets and even eat their food in there at breaks and lunches. We frequently have to call for the appropriate gender of staff to empty them out.
- Damage to toilets – pulling toilets/sinks off walls to crack the piping, inappropriate graffiti, stuffing inappropriate things down the toilet to block them.
- We have CCTV on the outside of the toilet area so sometimes we catch students failing to meet expectations and we bill parents for vandalism although rarely get sent the money.

### **How you can help?**

Please can you discuss with your child how:

- unhygienic eating in toilets is
- off-putting it is for students to be faced with a group hanging around in the toilets
- we need to make the most of learning time not wasting time in toilets with friends
- we are wasting school budget on repairs instead of improvements: £3000 this year!

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## Mobile Phone Frustrations

As parents, I think we can all agree that mobile phones can be the cause of many arguments with teenagers. Unfortunately, the challenges have become worse issue since Covid:

- Being **late** to every lesson as students are on their mobile phones
- **Sneaking in airpods** in lessons and listening to music etc and not concentrating on learning
- **Arranging to meet friends** during lesson time – typically in the toilets
- Taking photos of incidents and **sharing on social media**
- Sharing photos on social media of other students **without permission** – this is of particular concern as a number of parents have not given photo permission for their children, including for sensitive safeguarding issues. So, this has the potential to put students at risk
- Calling parents if they get into trouble – often giving their side of the story rather than allowing parents and teachers to discuss the whole picture adult-to-adult
- Calling parents to be picked up as they feel poorly – so our first aiders/reception team do not know anything until a parent arrives
- Answering calls and texts during lesson time
- Occasionally bullying/harassing/verbally abusing other students or winding up situations
- In a small number of concerning cases, students have arranged physical altercations using their phones and some of these have ended up being permanent exclusions.

A huge amount of staff time ends up being wasted on these issues that would be resolved by students not misusing their mobile phones. Too often, suspensions happen because of an issue that started with a mobile phone.

## Our mobile phone rules

- Phones/airpods/earphones etc cannot be out inside any buildings except the dining rooms at lunchtimes/break times. **This means they cannot be out in corridors either.**
- They cannot be used in lessons unless a teacher gives specific permission for a valid reason – such as referring to a website/using in GCSE photography.
- Phones should be on mute and safely tucked in a pocket or bottom of a bag.
- If a student is on their way to the C3 room, their phone should not be used.
- If a member of staff sees/hears a phone at the wrong time/place, it can be confiscated immediately and collected at the end of the day from reception. On the third occasion, a parent/carer has to collect it. This is not negotiable. Too many students try to argue back.

We have clocks in almost every room if the time needs to be checked. If a student needs to check their timetable (and by now they should know their timetable), they can do this outside between lessons quickly or ask their teacher before leaving the classroom.

## How can you help?

We are trying to avoid banning phones. Most schools do ban them. Student misuse is making it increasingly likely we will too. Please reinforce our expectations at home. Please avoid making or answering a call/text to your child during lesson time. If there is an emergency, we will call you.

**We hugely value our relationship with you so your support with these two knotty issues would be greatly appreciated as we strive to ensure students are supported, safe, and achieving their best.**

With kind regards



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