

# Minutes: St Olave's PA Form Reps meeting

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*Date:* Thursday 17 October 2019

*Location:* Main school library

*Attendees:* Mr Budds, (Deputy Headteacher), Ruwani Senaratna, Fatima Zahra, Haili Cui, Zey Kagan, Victoria Cattermole, Asma Meer, Lakshimanan AL, Vinita Suryanarayanan, Charlotte Rutter, Martine Magnan, Malini Rajendran and Winnie Leong

*Apologies:* Caroline Rous, Ping Chan Yin, Sangeeta Mead, Helene Huile, Arunima Saha, Lakshmi, Manish Vadukul, Baoching Liu, Jo Wright, Remi Adesina, Narinder Gill, Sue Watts, Tiffany Barradell, Rinku Chibber, Brid Nun and Rachel Rosser

## **Q1. New teachers**

- a. Several parents across Year 13 have contacted class reps to voice some concerns about maths teaching in this very critical A level year. This has now been raised to the school directly via Mr Budds. Can the school update parents on what action has been taken to address the concerns raised?
- b. Should newly qualified or inexperienced teachers new to the school teach years 11 and 13 while they are settling in, given the importance of those years and the fact that they need to hit the ground running in the Autumn term, with mock exams in January?
- c. This is equally important for Year 12 as this is the year when basic foundation for A levels needs to be laid.

## **Answer:**

Mr Budds had spoken to several students (both in Y13 and Y11) and was working very closely with the Head of the Maths department and other colleagues in the department who hold management responsibilities to hear and address any concerns raised. They have taken all the comments from students and parents on board.

He reiterated that the aim of the school is to ensure that students get the best education possible. This hasn't changed.

Mr Budds clarified the context of the staffing situation in Maths. Five very experienced teachers within the department had left the school this summer for a variety of different reasons (one retired, one went on maternity leave and the others have moved on to different types of school or different types of work altogether).

In terms of the school as a whole, a large proportion (more than half) of the teaching staff have at least ten years' teaching experience. There are only 4 NQT teachers in the school and are all supported by a mentor. One of the NQTs is in the maths department, and is a very able mathematician, as are all the other teachers in the department.

Mr Budds mentioned that teachers who are new to the school sometimes need to acclimatise a little to the needs of our bright and brilliant student cohort. However, there is an induction system in place for the new teachers with regular support meetings from their line managers.

Mr Budds met with students in Y13, who raised their concerns three-and-a-half weeks ago, as well as some Year 11 students. They have given him positive feedback more recently which gave evidence that colleagues had heard and were responding to the concerns raised and benefitting from the ongoing and established programmes of mentoring and observation. He has asked parents to ask their children if the system in place is working and to report any ongoing concerns. He has personally taken the time to observe several classes so has Ms Lawrence. They have scrutinised whether individual student needs are diagnosed and responded to accordingly. Pace and content coverage has also been observed. Other checks involved whether students had covered the necessary learning beforehand.

Further meetings with students to collate feedback have been organised by Ms Lawrence.

#### *Developing the pedagogy*

Whilst the school is confident of the mathematical ability of the teachers, all teachers in the department and indeed the school at large (via their programme of Continuous Professional Development, departmental meetings and line management) continue to work on refining their pedagogy. Mr Budds explained that there was a whole school initiative ongoing this academic year to explore cognitive theory and how we learn – and the best teaching strategies which can be used to embed learning.

#### *Mixed composition of students*

One of the particular challenges mentioned was the mixed composition of maths classes. Students are not streamed by ability (or at all) in Y13. As a result, some who had taken double maths the previous year but had opted to drop that subject are in the same class as those who had not previously studied double maths, creating additional challenge in terms of differentiation in the classroom.

Questions were raised about whether the maths classes would be split in the future

#### *New synoptic linear qualification*

Mr Budds also discussed the recent subject reform which saw a change from a modular to a linear system. In double maths, this has resulted in teaching becoming more pressurised; to address this pressure, more time has been added to double maths teaching for Year 13 in this academic year (an additional three periods per fortnight) and further adjustments to teaching allowance for the double maths qualification are under consideration.

#### *Rolling programme of drop-ins*

There is a rolling programme of drop-ins from the senior leadership team in place. The frequency of the drop-ins has been amplified.

#### *A level results*

The A level results in single Maths this year were excellent. The results in Further Maths have dipped a little.

#### *Measures already in place to support the teaching of maths*

- Twice weekly maths clinics – Monday and Friday lunch time
- Maths prefects
- Diagnostic teaching

d. These are very important years (Y11 and Y13) so students shouldn't be allocated to less experienced.

**Answer:**

Mr Budds acknowledged reiterated that a full programme of support and integration was in place for newer members of staff and to ensure that they have full access to departmental resources, techniques and approaches and that delivery on these was monitored.

- e. Are there adequate digital resources available for students to practice and explore e.g. on Moodle?

**Answer:**

Mr Budds said that students have a vast array of resources at hand through the VLE and Moodle. However, he was unclear as to whether activities or exercises with self-marking facilities were available to students.

**Q2. Year 10 – Residential trips in Activities Week**

- a. Are all these residential trips compulsory? As far as the parents are aware, the school cannot make these compulsory if it involves financial burden on the parents or parents don't want their children to participate.

**Answer:**

The trips are not compulsory. They are all voluntary. For those who would like to go but may require some financial assistance, please write to Mr Rees. Pupils also currently have the option of remaining at school and participating in other activities or staying in the MFL classrooms.

- b. For German language students the relevant trip is a German exchange, is going to France or any other trip an option?
- c. What are the options if pupils opted not to go to any of the trips on offer during Activity week 2?

**Answer: (combined answer to b, and c)**

In Activity Week 2, the three language groups – French, German and Latin – have different options. The French trip is popular and well-attended. The German trip is longer and it is an exchange trip and slightly less popular as Mr Budds acknowledged that not everyone feels comfortable living with a family abroad which is what an exchange entails.

The Head of Year 10 has come up with a new PGL trip for this year only for those who don't want to go on the German exchange. This is an outward bound, camping-style trip. Details of this will be going out to parents very shortly.

Mr Budds acknowledged that the Germanists and Latinists didn't currently have the same opportunity as the French students. There is a classics trip to Greece for Year 13 which is open to Y10 as well this year.

For 2020/2021, Mr Budds and the Head of Classics are in the process of putting together a UK-based set of activities for the Latinists such as trips to British Museum, Lullingstone Villa, Hadrian's wall and other sites of classical interest such as Wrexham in Shropshire.

- d. Can Year 10 pupils stay in form rooms during lunchtime? This gives them the option of catching up on their work etc. The library is a good place but unfortunately it is generally packed with other year groups as well.

**Answer:**

No, as this is a privilege for Y11 students only. It is not being extended to Y10 for the following reasons: although there are some fantastically mature Y10s, there are also some who can be a little more rambunctious.

When it is raining, all boys can go to their form rooms. Mr Budds said that there are plans to beef up the availability of computers at lunch time. There were also challenges around using the space around the ADT block.

- e. There used to be a card game / board game club(s) during lunch but this is no longer available. Can one be set up?

**Answer:**

This club is being revived and will be run by the Sixth form prefects. Mr Twose is overseeing this but there are challenges around rooms. They tried Room 19 previously but it was an eating area and there were issues with this. Currently Room 22 is being considered as the venue as it is a decent-sized classroom.

**Q3. Negative balance on the fob.**

- a. A student from Year 8 had to starve for the one day as there was insufficient credit on his fob. It wasn't until paying for the lunch did the boy realise the situation. The kitchen staff was unable to allow him to take any food and he had to starve that day. Could the canteen staff provide food for child even with a negative balance, knowing that it will be topped up by the next day?

**Answer:**

Mr Budds had spoken with Mr Harris, the catering manager from the **Independent Catering**, who is responsible for the catering. A £3 overdraft had been set up on **ALL** student accounts and this has been in place for some time.

However as from this year, Independent Catering will only offer the OD credit to students in Y7 as they are new to the school. The decision taken by Independent Catering to withdraw this OD facility from ALL students' accounts is because over the past two years, this OD system has been abused by students (e.g. some left the school with a negative balance).

Currently, there are several warnings in place to alert students to potential negative balances:

- the catering staff at the till are incredibly proactive and will remind students to top up their cards;
- parents will receive notifications when a certain threshold is reached; and
- auto top-up options are available.

Mr Harris has assured the school that this is taken seriously.

- b. Further questions from form reps: A parent asked if the school was seriously still going to allow a *child to starve just because a family member forgets to top up*.

**Answer:**

This situation shouldn't happen due to all the checks and balances that are in place. Independent Catering cannot provide infinite credit. Parents are encouraged to use the auto top-up option if they may be too busy to respond to notifications.

#### **Q4. German pen pal response**

- a. Some of the classes doing German wrote to German pen pals end of last school year and have not had responses from the pen pals shared with them via the school while other classes have received their responses. The boys have asked on numerous occasions for the responses but to no avail.

#### **Answer:**

The Head of German has checked with her colleagues and the lack of response for one class was due to the fact that the boys had not been tasked with sending letters to their pen pals. This has now been resolved and the letters from the boys were only collected on the 14<sup>th</sup>; Mrs Andrews has posted these. The German school are on their Autumn break at the time of this meeting but hopefully will get a response soon.

- b. There are never any replies for any emails sent to teachers regarding pupils.

#### ***Response from form reps***

Several form reps disagreed and confirmed that replies from teachers are always very prompt.

#### **Answer:**

Mr Budds requested more specific information about this particular query. He said that parents have been known to accidentally send emails to the wrong address (e.g. misspelling a name). It could possibly be as simple as this. So please check the email address or send the email to the school office and ask the office to forward to the teacher.

#### **Q5. 6<sup>th</sup> form ladies' toilet**

- a. The girls' toilets are not well kept and sometimes there is shortage of toilet tissues.

#### **Answer:**

Toilet standards are a perennial issue on student councils in this school and others.

There are two separate issues here: maintenance and awareness of the process to address any shortage of supplies.

**1 – maintenance** – a lot of money was spent two years ago in refurbishing the boys' lavatories; once you start doing that the others that haven't been done start looking shabby. The next toilet refurbishment project will be on the toilets in the foyer. The Sixth Form Association has also started on a fund-raising project to reform some that are more than 12 years old.

#### **2 – Shortage of toilet tissue**

If there is an absence of any toilet material the protocol is to notify reception who will in turn notify the premises team who will sort it out. Students are regularly reminded of this protocol.

- b. Are there enough female toilets?

#### **Answer:**

The ratios of toilets to pupils by gender were checked two years ago and the outcome was that there are enough. The key is to discover all of them – those in the foyer as well as the science, humanities and PE blocks.

#### **Q6. Year 12 social structure**

Perhaps next year the Y12 social could take place immediately after the information evening which was well-attended and informative, but which would have been even better had it included an opportunity to socialise.

**Answer:**

Good plan. The suggestion will be put forward to the PA committee. There was acknowledgement that parents may not want to go out twice to two different school events at the start of term.

Volunteers were requested.

**Q7. Thank you from a Year 9 class**

Very pleased with the opportunity to start GCSE options this year; boys seem happy to have made their own choices.

Continue to be impressed by the care and opportunities offered to the boys by the school

**Answer:**

Mr Budds responded with: "thanks for the thanks". "It is good and pleasing to hear this. Inevitably people come to a forum like this because they have questions about how things are run etc. So it is always nice to receive appreciation."

**Any other business**

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**AOB Q1a:** How much is being done in to develop life-skills, interview skills and in the area of careers advice and psychometric testing? Can this be introduced earlier e.g. in Year 9?

**Answer:**

Careers advice is offered in Year 10 via the Morrisby test that involves psychometric testing. The Centigrade test is offered in Y11 when choosing options for Sixth Form.

Although there are many who know what they want to do, these tests have proved useful for those who don't. The personality tests are useful as well.

Mr Budds will speak with Mrs Stella Platts to discuss upscaling the careers provision.

**AOB Q1b:** If the Centigrade and Morrisby tests are so expensive, can the school buy the software and implement this in the school?

There was further discussion around various inexpensive testing options such as Fast Tomato (offered at another school). This helped students identify their strengths, interests and skills.

**AOB Q2a:** Is there adequate CCTV coverage? Is there a need to increase security?

**Answer:**

Mr Budds said that he felt that there was a happy medium of adequate CCTV to track certain parts of the school without becoming 'Big Brother-ish' or anything like a quasi-police state. He was of the opinion that adequate deterrence measures are in place. Additional CCTV was installed in the Sixth Form common room a couple of years ago.

He asked whether there was a particular area where students or parents felt there was a need for this?

Separately, Mr Budds informed everyone of an episode of vandalism in the boys' toilet where the CCTV footage of the corridor directly outside the toilet helped determine the boys in question.

**AOB Q2b:** Further questions from form reps related to security and protecting the school from outsiders and also re: the integrity of students and whether CCTV was necessary at all?

**Answer:**

He said that it is relatively rare that CCTV has to be consulted. The students are generally fairly good with coming up with the truth. Security is in place to monitor who walks into the building.

**AOB Q3a:** Can we have more healthy food rather than jellies, desserts and other sweet options?

**Answer:**

Healthy options are already provided e.g. there are fruit options as well as traditional puddings or desserts. The main hot meal usually incorporates a dessert. However, students have the option of choosing fruit instead.

There would probably be small scale rioting if all the desserts were curtailed. It was National Vegetarian Day on Tuesday and there was a great groan from a lot of the boys in the whole school assembly when this was mentioned. The feeling is that the removal of pudding is likely to be still less well received.

**AOB Q3b:** Can Halal options be introduced?

The caterer had been approached before. However, this has proved difficult as not all students would buy the Halal option. There isn't the scope to have that much choice i.e. Halal and non-Halal chicken, for instance.

**AOB Q4:** Absence from school to attend football league matches or tours.  
Are they allowed to take a few days off from school for this?

**Answer:**

Mr Budds advised the parent concerned to file an authorised absence request while qualifying this with the general policy of encouraging boys to maintain as high a record of attendance as possible, citing the proven correlation between attendance and attainment.

**AOB Q5:** Oxbridge prep

**Answer:**

Mr Budds briefly summarised the whole process that begins in the February of Year 12. Further details are sent out to all Y12 parents and students well in advance.

He discussed current preparation for tests set by Oxford and Cambridge at the end of October explaining how individual departments lay on provision and support in the weeks before the test.

After these tests, the focus switches to interview preparation. All past students who have been for interviews are encouraged to write these up and post them on the VLE. These are available to all students and are a rich and useful resource for all.

**Date for the next meeting: 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020**