

Ballakermeen High School Newsletter, February 2019



Dear Parent/Carer,

As we are almost half way through a school year, I thought it would be useful to provide you with an update.

Mobile Phones

At the start of this academic year, we made mobile phones 'invisible', meaning that we do not want to see them, unless a teacher invites students to use them as part of a lesson. We are having to confiscate no more than 4 or 5 mobiles a day, which in a school of 1650 students is an impressive statistic. Thank you for supporting us with this initiative, which has greatly improved interaction between students, and students and staff. Of course, if a parent needs to contact a child urgently, reception staff will always take a message and if a student needs to contact home, we have a 'free phone' in reception. It is lovely to see our students talking to each other and playing games, rather than looking down at a screen all the time.

School Uniform

We have recently introduced a uniform card, so that we can challenge the small minority of students who regularly flout the uniform rules. Already, the improved level of smartness is impressive. More importantly, we want to acknowledge the 99% of students who wear their uniform with pride. We are working with our School Council to agree on suitable rewards.

GCSEs

In November of Year 11, students take some external exams early and the results are now available. Grades A* - C at GCSE are considered 'good' grades and I am pleased to inform you of the following A* - C results:

Mathematics	62%
Science	66%
English	76%

There are 10 school weeks left before the exam season begins in earnest. We will continue to work with all our students to ensure they all have positive choices and suitable pathways for life beyond compulsory education.

Social Media Incident

You may have seen, or heard about a disturbing video on social media which shows one of our students being assaulted off site, by another student, after the school day has finished. Our most important duty is to keep students safe while they are in our care, and while this attack took place beyond the school environs, I have acted to ensure that children are protected at school, and we are working with the Department of Education, Sport and Culture, the police and other agencies to that end.

Working in Partnership with You

It has been my privilege to serve as Head Teacher of Ballakermeen for nineteen years. I am immensely proud of so many things, not least the achievements of generations of students who have passed through the ranks. As the school's vision statement makes clear, it is our duty to prepare our young people to take their place in society as good citizens.

Central to this, as it is in any outstanding school, is the forging of a strong partnership with our parents. I am especially grateful for the support we receive over the school year, exemplified in the excellent turnout on Academic Tutoring days and open evenings, as well as the various showcase events. We are also fortunate to have the dedication and commitment of our parents' association, 'BHSA' who, through a range of activities, raise funds for invaluable equipment and resources. Above all, I am thankful for the civilised and courteous way in which the majority of parents conduct themselves in their dealings with the school.

Understandably, there are times when parents have legitimate questions to pose, and vice versa. As a Head, these exchanges are essential when they are focused on the best interests of a child's educational provision and personal welfare. I would expect these interactions to be conducted in a polite manner at all times. If you are not satisfied with the outcome you have recourse to a formal complaints procedure, something which I am pleased to say is extremely rare. The details are on the website.

I regret to report, however, that there have been a number of occasions recently when members of my staff, both teaching and support, have been subjected to unwarranted and unacceptable abuse, over the telephone, via e-mail or in person. I would like to remind parents that abusive behaviour will not be tolerated and as is the policy throughout government, I will be instructing colleagues who are being verbally abused to state that they are ending the conversation, or meeting.

The vast majority of our interactions with parents are positive and courteous and I am sure that you will share my ambition that all our communications should be equally respectful.

With very best wishes,

P. A. Burnett,
Head Teacher