

25th February 2019

Dear Parent/Carer,

Many thanks as always for your support throughout the winter, in sending them in in appropriate uniform and even when it snowed... We appreciate it even if they don't!

Reminders:

Now that spring is coming, a few reminders; the blazer is a compulsory part of the uniform and should be worn at all times, the jumper is optional. Trainers are not permitted except for PE (shoes should look like appropriate office wear) and nail colours/false nails, any extreme hair colour or style and excessive make up are not permitted. These rules are for many reasons but most importantly they exist because we cannot teach our young people that their image is more important than their character. Uniform exists so that our differences are minimised and the commonality in our community can be visibly evident – and the teenage years are key to the teaching of the sense of respect and belonging that uniform, school expectations and professionalism create.

Social Media:

I have found myself spending yet more time dealing with young people who are mishandling their involvement in social media – inappropriate comments about others, arguments that start innocently but end unpleasantly and even distressing exchanges about personal matters are becoming more and more common with this generation and they are not always equipped to handle this kind of public discussion well. You cannot easily forget a comment made in anger when it has been shared widely – either as the victim or the aggressor – and yet learning to leave behind moments of tensions, anger or misjudgement is part of growing up. I implore all parents – and I am one – to be ever more vigilant in supervising your children's use of social media. Remember – the accounts are not attached to the phone, so just taking the phone from them is not always enough to halt their engagement in unpleasant or dangerous exchanges. Tell them that they must show you their social media accounts – they will have SnapChat and Instagram at the very least – if they want to keep their phones, and please restrict their time on them in the evenings; this is the period where many arguments turn ugly and the effect of this is to keep them up all night, tired and anxious.

Ofsted update:

GAA has had a third monitoring visit under Special Measures (report available on the website) and I am pleased with a great many of the inspectors' findings, not least that we are more successful than ever before in terms of exam outcomes and that we are achieving this while being truly inclusive. It is my over-riding aim to give Ashton the great school it deserves and we continue to make good progress in this; with two more visits to go before we are re-inspected with the aim of coming out of Special Measures and beginning our route through the next phase of school improvement there is still work to be done however and in this as always I need your help. If you live in Ashton you should be able to send your children here for an education that is second to none – and that is only possible with a community who support us in holding our young people to account when they have made mistakes. We are inclusive – as Ofsted recognise – and we do not give up on young people, but we do need to point them in the right direction when they need it. It is why I sometimes ask you to help them avoid certain areas or parks, why I ask you to support them in spending less time on social media and why I sometimes ask you to meet with me or my staff to agree a way forward. Keeping them safe and confident, not anxious, worried or stressed about fractured friendships is actually extremely important if we are going to make sure every child fulfils their potential.

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Coming up: - For Y11, it is the beginning of the countdown. Students in 2019 are likely to sit more exams than any generation before them; while they have a level playing field in that all students across the country will do the same, it is fair to say that the number of exams young people face is potentially overwhelming, and I speak as a mum of a Y11 student myself. All my years in education tell me though that young people are resilient and can manage if they feel secure. That means making sure they know it is not about the grade they get it is about the learning they went through and the experience, resilience and self-discipline they will gain from being part of this generation. Get them working hard, don't let them waste their time in school – but help them know they are not defined by the numbers they leave with, only by what they are then equipped to do with them.

For Y9, it is the beginning of exam course planning as they choose their KS4 subjects with us. In many ways this is the key year in school as it sets a path they will follow for some right up until they start work. Please come along to our Options evenings and talk to the staff about what they can do – the more informed you all are, the more likely it is they will make good decisions.

We are launching an amazing opportunity for the current Y9 and 10 students – GAA Ecuador 2020 – with our partner Camps International. This will see us run a full month's expedition to the Amazon rainforest, the equator and the Andes – what is more, the students themselves raise the finance gaining valuable entrepreneurial experience along the way... Look out for more information in February and March.

For Y7 and 8 there is the Jamie's Farm residential once again – but what they should really do is keep one eye on that Ecuador Expedition; it will be their turn in two years' time if we can turn this into a GAA tradition.

Plus, for parents and local partners there will be our first ever May Ball, a GAA fundraising event designed to show the rest of the North West what Ashton has to offer and raise charity funds to boot... Watch this space for how you can get involved.

These are exciting times to be part of our GAA community – and we would not be in a position to offer any of the opportunities we now can if it were not for the support you have given us – and me personally – over the last two years as we have begun to transform the academy. We are only half way there; you have my word I will do all in my power to make the next two better yet.

Yours sincerely



Mrs J Langley
Principal