

Parent Voice

Tuesday 28th June 2022 9:00am & 5:00pm

Q&A

- Is there a plan for the GCSE roll out? What about the Year 8s picking their option subjects?

Our Year 8s are going to be choosing their subject pathways for their option subjects at the end of Year 9. These will be the GCSEs they study in Years 10 and 11. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on our students, we have made an informed decision to do this, so that the students have an amazing foundation of subject knowledge for them to choose from. We are offering taster sessions for options subjects so students get a more detailed awareness of what to expect from each subject; this will help them to make the right decision for them in regards to their GCSE subject choices.

- Are there any plans to improve homework and the process of completing homework or independent learning? Can we receive texts when our child receives homework?

There is a plan in the pipeline to improve homework for our students and offer a wider range of work and resources across all subjects. At the moment we have online work on various platforms (Language Nut, Sparks, Google classroom for example) and many resources available to our students (workbooks, work from specific departments and teachers for example) however we do believe there is room for improvement and would like to be able to offer more. We are in the process of creating a document to go on our website with direct links to our homework platforms; the link to this will also be sent out in a text message to parents. The text messages to parents when homework is set is something we can look into and discuss.

- I find it difficult to speak to the member of staff that I need to speak with. Sometimes it's hard to get through to Reception, and other times, I request a call back from a member of staff and never receive it. What is the process if I can't get through directly, what do I do then?

We understand the importance of communication between our students, parents and staff. Communication has a big impact on us all, which is why we are trying to improve the way we communicate with you. When you contact our Reception team, if they cannot assist with your query, they will transfer your call to the relevant member of staff (if they're available), or email the member of staff and ask them to contact you directly. Please be aware that many staff are teaching all day so may not be able to view their emails until the end of the day. Our Learning Managers and Senior Leadership Team are present on the hallways during lesson time, and are

present in the Dining Hall during break and dinner times, so again may not be able to view their emails until the end of the day.

We understand it can be frustrating when staff call and leave a message and don't identify themselves, so you're unsure who to ask for when you call back. We have passed this feedback on to all members of staff and now have a process in place to help you be able to communicate with us in this instance.

We also advise that during our out of office hours, you send your query to our enquiries line at enquiries@portland.outwood.com and we aim to pick these up the next working day, however, please allow 48 hours for a response. Please note our office hours are 8:00am – 4:00pm Monday to Friday.

- I find it hard to navigate and understand my child's Praising Stars reports. Is there a document with guidance to be able to do this?

We are in the process of creating a step-by-step guide to help parents and students navigate our Praising Stars reports. We are hoping to be able to add this to our website and we plan to send a text message to parents on the day of the Praising Stars release, to inform them that their child will have received their report, and attach the website link to the step-by-step guide.

- What SEN provisions are accessible to Outwood Academy Portland students?

We support students with a range of needs, including physical and medical needs, social, emotional and mental health needs, communication and interaction difficulties, sensory needs, autism, ADHD and students who have more difficulty with learning than the majority of children of the same age. We believe that all our pupils should be valued equally, treated with respect and be given equal opportunities in all forms of school life.

In addition to support from teaching assistants in the classroom and in small groups, Outwood Academy Portland provides the following additional resources for our SEND: transition, lunch support, homework support, teaching assistants, educational testing and screening, the Bridge, the Personalised Learning Centre (PLC), lift access, disabled parking bays, emergency evacuation procedures, physiotherapy room, assistive technology and exam access arrangements. Further information on our SEND Policy can be found on our website at: <https://academy-sites-files.outwood.com/customisedpolicy/283/file/dadabccdf708d977a945e07d9a2f465e.pdf>

- What support is there for students with mental health?

We ensure a positive learning environment where our students feel happy and able to flourish; this underpins everything we do. Within our curriculum we foster positive relationships, self-worth and acceptance teaching our students to recognise risk, accountability and positive choices. We have provided [a page on our website](#) to provide a comprehensive range of national and local services for our students and parents to access support for their mental wellbeing. We all have times when we have low mental well-being, where we feel stressed, upset or find it difficult to cope. To help our students outside of school time we work with The Wellbeing Hub and Parents, Students and Staff. We have been gifted membership of this invaluable resource that students can access for free. They can attend webinars on mental health issues and gain advice. We also work with Kooth and encourage students to access counselling via messaging service. This can be accessed every day from 10am onwards.

- I'm really concerned about the toilets and that there is only one toilet open in the school – is this true? What if my child doesn't have enough time during breaks or dinners to go to the toilet? Why are teachers not allowing the students to leave for the toilet?

There are toilets in the Dining Room that are available at any time throughout the day, to be used by all students. These are the toilets that students should always use; they are regularly cleaned, fully supervised, and open all day. The split-break and split-lunch means students can access these without issue during break and lunch times. Additionally, there are toilets located around the school in non-supervised locations, which have been closed during lesson time, to reduce the missed learning time of students who leave lessons to go to these toilets. However, should a student really need to leave a classroom, and miss the lesson's content in order to use a toilet during learning time, they do have access to the main toilets that are always open and supervised in the Dining Room. Please note all disabled toilets in the school are open at all times. If students have medical conditions that require them to use the toilet frequently, they can be given a toilet pass which allows them to leave lessons to use the toilet. Staff are asked to use their own discretion when allowing students out of lesson to use the toilet. Our toilets in the Dining Room are currently manned by a member of staff, who monitors the toilet use and ensures no damage or vandalising happens.

- Has the consequences system been evaluated; is it working? There are inconsistencies between different teachers which makes it ineffective.

We want to help students to make the right choices. In order to do this, it is important to help students understand that actions have consequences, and as part of this system we operate a robust sanction and reward system. This is part of how we manage behaviour rather than the

entirety of our processes, which include how we live our values, and constantly teach one another by our actions and our words. Our sanction systems are there to act as mild deterrents to misbehaviour, and as part of how we define and uphold our culture of safety, respect and responsibility. They work best when they are consistent, fair and proportionate

A sanction may be issued by a member of staff where a student does not act safely, respectfully or responsibly or does not accept responsibility for their actions. When determining the sanction to be issued, the member of staff will consider the student's circumstances (including their age and any SEND) alongside the circumstances of the case. The sanction issued will be appropriate to the seriousness of the incident taking those factors into account. Our full behaviour policy can be found on our website at: <https://academy-sites-files.outwood.com/policy/16/file/e6708fd70c4983e1fcb59863dff19a04.pdf>

- Is there anything in place for students who don't want to go on the Proud Podium? Some students aren't confident enough and don't think it is 'cool' to go on it.

We are in the midst of developing and launching a new rewards programme, a 'Silent Star'. This will be most effective for the students that struggle in front of a crowd and don't feel comfortable going up and celebrating at our Proud Podium. We appreciate that all children are different and will benefit from different methods of praise. We have recently been posting our Shooting Star and Shining Star certificates out to parents, to give recognition for students from each subject. As a trust, we also have the following methods of praise for students: Outwood Honours Programme, Praising Stars, Graduation, Outward bound experience, Prom, Attendance awards and our Pledges scheme. More information on our behaviour and praise scheme can be found on our website at: <https://academy-sites-files.outwood.com/policy/16/file/e6708fd70c4983e1fcb59863dff19a04.pdf>

Our teachers and support staff have also recently been creating their own personalised praise stickers to give to students; these have been received really well by the students! It has also been suggested by some of our teaching staff that students are given Proud Podium stickers, encouraging them to go to the Proud Podium by their teacher, because they've been recognised for their efforts and work.

- Could we have text messages sent out when our child brings home an important letter?

This is something that we feel is definitely important and is now going to be incorporated into our communication systems based on this suggestion.

- Could we have an enrichment timetable posted on the website? When enrichment times are changed or cancelled we never get any notice.

There is an enrichment calendar that gets updated every term. This can be found on our website at: <https://www.portland.outwood.com/enrichment-and-extended-learning>. Any last minute changes to enrichment will be communicated via text message.

- When my child has an appointment and needs a 'permission to leave' slip, they're sent to their Learning Manager, who often isn't available. Can the attendance team not just give the students the slips and then the student can give the evidence of appointment to attendance too?

We ask that a child's routine medical and other appointments are made out of school time, where possible. We understand that this is not always possible though and we ask that we are notified in advance. This can be done by telephone, email or a note provided from home or appointment letter/ card to confirm the appointment. This evidence can be given to Learning Managers, the attendance team or Student Reception. Where possible, the child should attend School before the appointment and return to lessons afterwards.

- Why can't my child take their blazer off when walking around the Academy? Uniforms are uncomfortable, especially in the heat. The quality of the uniform is poor.

Regarding the quality of our uniform, securing value for money has been the key driver within the Trust's procurement of school uniforms; both quality of material (including durability and wearability) and cost were tested with suppliers during the procurement process. Students can take their blazers off within classrooms and during very hot months, (at the Principals discretion) students and staff can take their blazers off and carry them around the school.

- I'm quite concerned that my child has had a lot of supply teachers. I worry that the teaching and learning has been inconsistent. Is there any way that parents could be made aware of cover staff? Should these cover staff be grading students for their Praising Stars reports?

We totally understand your concern regarding supply staff and try to ensure as an academy we use a regular team that have been quality assured by the lead of teaching and learning within the academy. Our Heads of Department look at the distribution of cover staff amongst the students and will make staffing changes where possible or try to cover lessons from the body of staff within the department. Short term supply staff do not have access to the Praising Stars reports and this is the responsibility of the Heads of Department.

- Could there be a section on the website of 'whose who' with photos of staff?

This is something that we are updating over the holidays to ensure we have up to date photos of all of our team. We understand that this would be really helpful and thank you for the suggestion.

- What trips and visits do you have planned? I feel my child has missed out quite a lot because of Covid-19.

We have already started running trips and experiences for the pupils such as a Y7 theatre trip, a Y10 trip to the Thackeray Medical Museum and the Y8 Wise Up day. We have plenty of events and trips planned for next year's calendar and look forward to all the students being involved. This includes a Geography trip to the coast, a History WW2 survival day and an Army event day to name but a few.

- Are the pledges still being used?

We are happy to announce that we are relaunching Pledges for the new term and cannot wait to inform parents and students of our exciting plans. We really believe that this will be motivational and confidence building as well giving the students a chance to perform tasks that will build on their life experiences.

- I have concerns about the behaviour of some students on the school buses. What is in place to sort this?

We are working tirelessly alongside the bus companies to ensure that all bus behaviour is being resolved. We appreciate any parental information or phone calls regarding the buses as this gives us vital information and can help to resolve the issues. We are creating a plan for September alongside the bus companies and aim to share that information with staff and students in the coming months. Please report any behaviour as we have been issuing bus bans to students who are not behaving in the appropriate and safe way on the buses.

- I'd like regular updates from my child's Learning Manager. Can this be facilitated?

The job of a Learning Manager is naturally very busy as they look after the welfare of all of the 300 pupils in their year group. Learning Managers consistently make contact with parents regarding the welfare and well being of the children but it would be unmanageable to provide regular updates on a child. The Learning Managers are in attendance at Parents' Evenings for you to talk to regarding your child and you can also schedule meetings or phone calls with them for any issues.

- What are you doing to reduce disruption in the corridors during lessons?

The corridor disruption is now almost non-existent due to the wonderful corridor and behaviour plan that has been put in place. This is with full support from all staff and all students are aware of the consequences of their actions if they are to disrupt learning. Students are moving around the academy in a very quiet and purposeful manner and we aim to keep it like this.

- Breaks and dinner times are not long enough. Students can't eat and go to the toilet with enough time. Can the breaks and dinner times be increased? What about when the student intake increases? Can students eat their lunch outside? Could there be any activities available like sports games?

Students can eat outside in the quiet outdoor picnic area and we are currently reviewing the outdoor activities for our pupils as well as creating learning opportunities that they can take part in within the canteen. We always ensure that there are plenty of opportunities for students to get their food, with several queue systems running at once.

- Can parents have access to the food menus in the dining hall?

The menu is available to parents on the school website - <https://www.portland.outwood.com/posts/3562>

It is rotated every week and we have a fabulous chef that serves the dining hall like a restaurant. He provides lovely food for our pupils and is often known to create students' requests for different items.

- When is Ofsted due?

Ofsted do not pre inform us of the time that they will visit our school but we look forward to the opportunity to show how wonderful our students and staff are.

- Could we have a termly newsletter describing recent events and what's on this term? This could also include a calendar of events.

A termly newsletter is in the pipeline for the new term and we are looking into a calendar for the school website that is easy to view and provides key dates and information. This is a wonderful idea and thank you for the suggestion.

- Is there a programme for students to volunteer with other students to help with reading, being a mentor, and with events in schools? If so, how would they go about volunteering for this?

We absolutely love to give our students the opportunity to help and volunteer for different areas of responsibility around the school. We have an active Student Parliament that meets on Thursdays and that all students can be part of. We have also launched a Student Mentor scheme this half term and this has involved older students mentoring some of our Y7 students. In our Transition week we have used student sports leaders to run activities as well as show the new students around the school. Students can sign up to various opportunities by asking their Learning Managers, teachers and form teachers as well as turning up at the enrichments that are scheduled. The opportunities are going to become even more frequent in the new term so please look out for any announcements on our website or via text.

- We enjoy getting the Shooting Star and Shining Star certificates in the post. Can we have more communication when our child has praise? Such as text messages, phone calls etc.

We are so happy that the postal communication is working well and totally agree that we need more praise outlets such as phone calls and texts. We are hoping to be able to use our planners as a complete home communication system and to share messages and praise with parents and carers. Positive texts are an excellent idea and we will look into how this can be utilised in the new term.

- Should planners be used every lesson? Can students be made aware that planners are for parents, students and teachers, not just them?

Planners are used in every lesson and need to be out on the desks at the beginning of all lessons and left open on today's date. We are in total agreement that the planner needs to be utilised by all parties and is the ideal way for us all to communicate together. The importance of the planner will be reiterated in the induction to the new term to all pupils.

- When is the next Parents Evening and what is the plan? Will they be face to face or via video link?

We are excited for Parents Evening to go back to being face to face again as it is wonderful to show parents and carers the school and the students work. We understand how difficult it was for parents/carers that had children in different year groups and want to make it accessible to everyone.

- Could there be a Parent's Hub set up, where parents can talk to each other. It would be a positive tool and not something negative and would help to build positive relationships between parents.

We are going to keep Parent Voice meetings as part of the academy calendar and these will happen once every half term at two different times of the day. I am also in the process of setting up a Portland Parent and Teachers Association. This will be a fantastic opportunity for the school to work alongside the parents and offer many opportunities for us all to come together as a community.

- There needs to be a better understanding of the expectations for the Y6-7 transition students. It seems like a big jump from Primary to Secondary for both students and parents. How can we lessen this gap?

We totally agree that this is something that needs to be reviewed as a school to ensure that there is adequate time and resources to provide the smoothest transition possible for all involved. This year we have brought in bespoke transition days for small groups of students as well as offering a two day transition and open evening for all students planning on attending Portland.

- Why has this been the first Parents Voice meeting of the year? We used to have them more regularly and they were really helpful and informative.

Due to Covid restrictions we have been unable to host plentiful parental events within the school but this will now be a regular half termly event on the calendar and we look forward to inviting parents and carers into school for other events throughout the year.

- The value of some school policies would be increased if we had more communication when things change. For example, the hands up straight, toilets, PE policies.

We totally agree with you. Transparency and communication is the key. Our policies and procedures are available on our school website for everyone to read and we are now creating a newsletter that will aim to add an additional layer to our information sharing and home communication.

- Some teachers are unprofessional; they have their shoes off in lessons, and wear inappropriate uniform. Is there a staff policy in place to deal with this?

We have a strict staff dress code policy which needs to be adhered to by all staff. The only time I am aware that teachers would have their shoes off is in a Drama lesson where the students also do not wear shoes due to the nature of the activity. If staff are found to not adhere to the staff dress code then they will be questioned by their line manager.

- In what year group do students have their careers meeting? Could the 'What's Next' and other career events be opened up to those in the younger year groups?

Y11 students gain access to a one to one careers meeting as well as Y10 bookable appointments but our careers programme aims to offer activities all the way from Y7 upwards. We are hoping to host regular career cafes throughout the year as well as hosting Hepp and Heppsy events with the younger years. It would be amazing for us to gain access to the 'What's Next' festival for younger students and we are aiming to provide as many exciting career opportunities for all of our students over the coming year.

- Are we able to watch our children in sporting events like matches and tournaments? Could a PE calendar of events for sporting activities be put on the website or Twitter and sent out to parents?

This is something that we are waiting to have confirmed but as soon as we do we will be able to advertise this on our calendar and through Twitter and text.

- How has the academy used Covid-19 catch-up funding?

The funding has been used for a range of different interventions at the academy such as supporting 1-2-1 and small group tuition in Maths, English and Science. We have also purchased online learning resources to support students in literacy and numeracy. The funding has enabled the academy to run holiday intervention sessions for students in their preparations for GCSE examinations. The funds have also been used to purchase additional resources to enhance our curriculum offer in the Expressive Arts, Design & Technology and Sports Science. In terms of the team we have introduced the role of a Lead Learning Manager to help support students further across the year groups as well as a behavioural mentoring programme and further 1-2-1 support.