



**10 February 2023**

## Recent changes

Dear parents, carers and families.

The last few months have seen many changes in the school and while most of them in isolation are not hugely significant, taken together it may perhaps seem a little bewildering to some of our students and their families. Because many things have happened rather quickly, it hasn't always been possible to spend as much time as we would wish setting out our rationale in detail, sounding out opinions and giving people time to absorb the changes. It seems that now might be a good opportunity to take a little time to explain why we've made the changes we have and how we believe they will benefit our school community.

### Why change? The bigger picture

Change is a constant in education at all times but following the disruption of the pandemic, a greater pace of change has been inevitable for all schools. Well established routines often couldn't simply be reinstated as if nothing had happened - the world had moved on, and the experiences of students and colleagues during the pandemic meant that a 'new normal' needed to be established to meet the needs and expectations of the current generation.

As we reviewed our operations after Covid, and began to establish a new normal, it became clear that there were changes needed to some of our systems and there was a risk that if we didn't adapt quickly enough, Millthorpe would fall short of the high expectations we all - staff, students and their families - rightly have of the experience it delivers to students.

### The changing size of the school and the impact at social times

Millthorpe has well over 100 more students than it did five years ago; during two years of the pandemic, movement and social times were restricted and groups of students separated over split lunch times. Whilst this made transition around the site much smoother, split lunch times and break times did disrupt learning whilst other students played out and didn't enable us to run the extensive extra-curricular provision that we did previously. When we returned this year

to having one break time and one lunch time, we recognised that we would need to formalise the movement around school during these times to ensure that we could safeguard and actively supervise all of our children. Whilst the new canopy gives us excellent additional covered eating space, we needed to ensure that all students could access the different dining spaces comfortably and safely. Therefore, we brought in two sittings to lunchtime and a one-way system into and out of the dining hall and a queuing space that ensured students could progress quickly through the canteen. Inevitably change can, at first, feel strange and unnecessary to some students, but we can confirm that all students have had the rationale for this made clear to them before it was introduced. This has been a great success and now all students are able to eat in dining areas (pre-Covid, pack-ups had to use classrooms) and are able to have access to these areas in a timely manner enabling the students to also have play/social times. Opening up the MUGA to those who wish to play ball games has also given students access to sports in winter for the first time.

### **Our behaviour system**

We have always had a behaviour system at Millthorpe that is based on mutual respect, being safe and kind to each other. The previous behaviour system was set up to tackle mainly low-level disruption or incidents as the vast majority of our students are extremely well behaved and follow our high expectations. It was felt that the previous system (pre-2020), where detentions were issued for minor infringements, such as wearing a coat inside, or eating on a corridor were, perhaps, a little harsh and not always applied consistently. Equally using 'negative comments' in lessons didn't always enable us to address low level disruption. Post - pandemic (during which we were not able to record information in students' planners) we introduced a model whereby the accumulation of points would incur a detention, rather than isolated small incidents. Whilst this system has helped reduce low level disruption in the classroom, we believe that it is now time to review and evaluate its success to continue to further improve student experience.

We want to make it as easy as possible for students to do the right thing. With this in mind, we are about to share with students ten simple statements (five for inside the classroom and five for outside) linked to the three Rs (Respectful, Responsible, Ready). These are not new rules but simplify our existing expectations into easy to remember, common sense statements with the stated aim of 'allowing teachers to teach and students to learn' in the classroom and 'creating a positive community for all' elsewhere in school. [You can take a look at the expectations here.](#)

We have also listened to feedback from students, parents/carers and colleagues about how we encourage students to meet our expectations consistently. We want interactions between staff

and students to be warm and positive. So we will also be letting students know that we will no longer be tackling low level issues around the school using points: instead, we will acknowledge that the vast majority of students meet expectations without being asked and trust and encourage them to continue to do this; and, if they do forget (for example, to take off their coat, correct their uniform or follow one way routes), we'll just give them a polite reminder to correct the issue. We will be clear with students that we will continue to have consistently high expectations but only when students wilfully and/or repeatedly ignore polite requests will any sanctions be used.

### **The wider Trust team**

The increased capacity of the School Improvement Team in the Trust has given us the opportunity to move more quickly and with a more sustained focus in some areas; it allows us a broader insight into the most effective practices in place elsewhere in education and challenges us to set our sights high, while supporting us to deliver a vision that remains unique to Millthorpe and its very special character. It enables us to have access to specialist leaders of personal development, safeguarding, SEND and school improvement to ensure that our provision remains at the forefront of best practice and our colleagues are supported to provide the best that we can for our students.

Support from the Trust is also beginning to help update our school site even further as we have begun to improve our learning environments and social spaces, including a planned renovation to all of our SEND/Inclusion spaces and planned work to modernise our buildings, which has always been a challenge on this site. We will provide further updates on these exciting developments in due course.

### **Getting better not stricter**

Some of the changes may have felt like a tightening of rules and to some extent this may have been true. The priority after Covid was to re-establish routines that are simple, clear and consistent, which is vital for children to thrive. Everything we have put in place is designed ultimately to improve the experience for students and is common practice across other schools in the city and nationally. Different aspects may be challenging at times for an individual, but we know that high expectations, high attendance, good punctuality, good behaviour in lessons and calm, safe movement around the site lead, overall, to a better school experience and a better chance to learn for everyone.

**Focusing on the positive**

Changes to the rules are obvious, but much of the work that we are doing may be harder for families to see and will take longer to have a clear impact. Our work on developing the curriculum and the quality of our teaching is our number one focus and we're really excited about building a culture where teachers can keep improving and growing their skills and focusing on delivering great lessons, day in, day out, for all of our students regardless of their starting points. We have worked to establish greater recognition and celebration of the positive achievements of our students and giving them all the platform to excel in their areas of interest is a key priority for us in the months ahead. We know there is still much to do on enhancing our rewards, and we are working on this, but embedding clear routines gives us a strong platform to build on.

**The external perspective**

We, as a school and a wider MAT, are clear that we would not introduce anything that wasn't for the benefit of students. Nonetheless, it would be naive to think that any school can ignore the expectations of external bodies like the government and Ofsted. So, like every other school, we make sure that improvements are made in a way that is consistent with their latest guidance. This will help put the school in the strongest possible position to move forward and deliver its long-term vision.

**What Millthorpe deserves**

We're proud of our school but we know it can be even better because our community deserves to be served by a school that is the best that it can be. I feel privileged to work with such a wonderful team of teachers and support colleagues to provide the best education and all round provision that we can for the students in our care, so that they leave us in Year 11 as accomplished, successful, happy and kind young adults.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Greenhalgh', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ms G Greenhalgh  
Headteacher