



Headteacher: Ms G Greenhalgh

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02 March 2023

Dear parents/carers

We are aware of discussions taking place on social media about some of the changes that have taken place recently at school. Whilst we completely respect people’s right to have such conversations both on and offline, I am writing to you to provide the facts and rationale behind some of the systems and strategies that have been posted about and commented on. This follows my letter on 10 February, which you can [read here](#).

Attendance

Attendance at school is vital for pupils to reach their potential. We know that attendance levels nationally are not as high as they were before the covid-19 pandemic. The situation is more acute in the city of York and we all need to work together to improve this. We are keen to help pupils who are struggling to attend school for various reasons.

I know that Mr Beever [wrote to you on 31 January](#) regarding plans to improve communication with you on attendance by means of a weekly text message which lets you know your child’s attendance figure. This improved attendance system also enables us to let you know quickly if your child isn’t in school and therefore is an important safeguarding measure. Schools across the country have been using systems like this for some time, with much success in improving attendance and punctuality.

Overall attendance at Millthorpe is not where it should be but by working together with pupils and parents, including providing individual, timely information on attendance levels, we are already starting to see improvements and I’d like to thank you for your help with this. We do, of course, fully appreciate that for some students, attendance can be challenging and we will continue to work with families to support them.

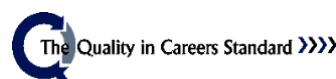
We would be keen to hear any ideas you have to improve attendance levels, whether this is individual for your child or more widely. Please do get in touch if you have any suggestions.

School rules and expectations

We are aware that there have been some comments and concerns regarding our expectations of pupils. In principle, these expectations are not new, but I would like to provide some clarity on recent developments.



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Having taken feedback from parents, pupils and staff, it was clear that some of the rules and expectations, which have been in place and added to over a good number of years, were simply too much. They were cumbersome and confusing and therefore this made it difficult for pupils to know whether they were getting it right or not. This sometimes led to a sense of unfairness, which we do not want. We have therefore simplified these expectations so that they are easier to understand. To help with clarity, these are clearly displayed around school. I wrote to you recently to keep you informed of these simplified expectations but for ease of reference, I have included these below:

Outside the classroom, we expect the following of pupils:

- Follow all instructions from adults
- Be polite and kind to everyone
- Be safe, calm and sensible
- Look after and care for our school
- Eat in our dining spaces and tidy up after yourself

Inside the classroom, we expect the following of pupils:

- Be on time with all your equipment
- Follow all instructions from adults
- Listen to learn
- Take pride in your work
- Be a gold standard learner

These expectations have been carefully worded to ensure they reflect the warm culture of Millthorpe and are not draconian or unreasonable. Having clear expectations within the classroom enables teachers to teach and pupils to learn, which is what we all want in school. Disruption simply cannot be ignored or tolerated and with these clear, simple expectations, we are already seeing improvements.

We are also aware of social media posts querying why we have boarded up windows with new display boards to enhance the environment. For clarity, the only windows which have been covered were old, unsightly windows which, for health and safety reasons needed to be replaced. These used to be external windows, but through time and expansion of the school, have become internal windows. Classrooms still have external windows bringing in natural daylight and these recent internal improvements, which are still ongoing, will create a more pleasant environment for all.

Some social media posts suggest that there may be some confusion over the 'listen to learn' wording that the school has introduced. This is a way of letting pupils know that it's time in the lesson for them to listen carefully, either to each other or to the teacher. It provides a common language which we know is important for all pupils but particularly those with additional needs, as it provides a consistency across the school.



Feedback from parents and pupils also told us that they thought that sanctions were sometimes given too frequently. I wrote to you recently to let you know that this has changed. Again, over a good number of years, sanctions have been given for various, sometimes very small, misdemeanours. Our view is that these are not always necessary and, in most cases, a reminder is enough. There are, however, certain situations where sanctions do need to be given: for example, for failing to follow a reasonable request or instruction from an adult. Again, this is not new but it is important to be clear on this.

One way system

We know that some of the corridor areas in Millthorpe are narrow and as a school where the building has been extended over a number of years, it is unconventional in layout and can sometimes be too busy. Therefore, like many schools, we needed to introduce a one-way system during social times. We know this takes some getting used to but we also know that this has meant that corridors are less busy, calmer and safer, which is better for everyone.

Access to toilets and CCTV

We ask that students use the toilet facilities before school, at breaktime, between lessons, at lunchtime and after school so as to minimise the need for students to leave the classroom during lesson time. This keeps disruption of their own learning, and that of other students, to a minimum and also reduces the chance for incidents to happen outside of the classroom when these areas may not be supervised. We expect students to come to class ready to learn, which includes having been to the toilet before the lesson.

If students do ask to go to the toilet during lesson time, teachers are asked to use their discretion. Students who are likely to need to use the toilet during lesson times (for example for health reasons) can request a pass from their teacher. This arrangement is usual practice in schools.

Over the summer of 2022, we installed brand new toilet facilities across the school site. We now have more toilets than we have ever had. Unfortunately, some additional work has been needed on some of our toilets. As a result, we have had to close some toilets for a short period in order to carry out this work. We have staggered the works, so no more than one block has been closed at a time and there have still been plenty of toilets available for use.

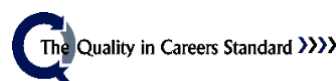
During break and lunchtime, we ask students to use one of the four toilet blocks in B Block. As we have explained clearly to students, A Block is not in use at these times as it is not supervised. The external doors are kept locked and for additional security; the toilets are also locked. This is for the safety and security of students in an area that is not supervised by staff.

CCTV has been operational across the school site and within toilet facilities for a number of years. Upgraded CCTV has now been installed, including in and around the toilet facilities, specifically in the central handwashing areas between the rows of cubicles, where we have



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had CCTV for over 10 years. There are no cameras inside the cubicles, and, to secure full privacy, all cubicles have full height doors that fit completely flush from floor to ceiling and no sound is picked up on the CCTV recordings.

The CCTV cameras not only enable us to ensure the safety of our students, but also help to deter vandalism or, when it does unfortunately occur, identify anyone responsible. This reduces the cost, inconvenience and negative impact of deliberate damage to facilities that should be available in good condition for all students to use. CCTV footage helps to make the toilets safer and more welcoming spaces for the vast majority of students who wish to use them as they are intended.

Communication

Millthorpe has always had an effective pupil voice, a parent forum, staff voice and open, two-way communication channels and we want this to continue. We are always keen to hear the views of stakeholders and we take these views on board.

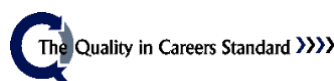
Unfortunately, some of the recent posts and comments on social media do not reflect the reality of what is happening at Millthorpe School. Much of what is posted is either untrue or taken out of context. Sadly, some posts are simply attacks on the school which undoubtedly have an impact on the morale of our very hardworking staff and pupils and all of the great work that is going on in the school.

I would encourage current or prospective parents/carers to get in touch with the school if you have any questions or concerns or would like us to clarify anything. Of course, we are also happy to arrange visits to the school. There is a real sense of warmth and mutual respect between pupils and staff at Millthorpe and I would be very happy for anyone to see and experience this for themselves.

I hope this provides some clarity on some recently raised issues but please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any further questions or comments. We are keen that we all work together to ensure that all our children receive an excellent experience of school.

Yours faithfully

Gemma Greenhalgh
Headteacher



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