

Fred Longworth High School
Parents' Forum
13 March 2014

Minutes

1	School's response to the new accountability measures and changes to GCSE.
1.1	The School Day Parents were asked whether they felt that we should make any changes to the structure or length of the school day. The general consensus was: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There was no appetite for a school day ending later than 3.00pm – parents felt that the work life balance for students and staff was important. It was pointed out that there was still time for students to enjoy their time at home once homework was completed. It was therefore seen as a good idea to finish by 3pm.• Length of lessons was felt to be broadly right at around an hour. One parent pointed out that this provided continuity from primary school. Some concern was expressed that an hour might be too long for a lesson, but it was pointed out that practical subjects needed at least 50 minutes to make the most of the time available. It was pointed out that some schools do very long sessions of around 90 minutes, but this was asking a lot of students' concentration.• Extra curricular activities, after school and at lunchtime, were highly valued by parents. The school should be mindful of anything that might prevent good involvement in these activities.• There was some discussion around the length and nature of lunchtimes. It was felt that any significant time cut from lunchtime might interfere with extra curricular activities. There was some further discussion about our system of "sittings". Mrs Garretts confirmed that we intend to trial a "no sittings – first come, first served" system after Easter. This might speed up the queue, as those in classrooms close to the canteen would be served quickly without having to queue unnecessarily for a later sitting. Parents agreed that this might be a good idea.

1.2 Key Stage 4 – 2 or 3 years?

- Parents were asked what their views would be if we were to consider a three year key stage 4, with options chosen at the end of Year 8. The general consensus was that we should not have options in Year 8 because students in Year 8 may lack the maturity to choose options. A Year 9 parent indicated that it was a difficult enough process for students in Year 9.
- It was felt that the Year 9 course would have to be skills based – it would certainly not be appropriate for students to complete coursework at this early stage.
- It was pointed out that it would be more possible for students to change subjects after starting their course because of the extra time available for the course.
- There was also some concern expressed as to how this would impact upon Year 8 – though it was acknowledged that students might be more committed to their studies in Year 8 if they knew it was “options year”.
- The general consensus was to leave options to the end of Year 9.

1.3 Pathways

Parents were asked if the current banding of students for Key Stage 4 (the P, O, M and N Band system) should be done earlier. There were some concerns expressed about the dangers of “labeling” students too early, but the general consensus was that the advantages of grouping the students in this way at the end of Year 8 outweighed potential disadvantages. This would enable core subjects (English, Maths and Science) to begin GCSE work in Year 9 without students having to choose options at this stage.

1.4 Linear exams/pressure

There was some discussion around whether some exams (eg. one of the Sciences) could be taken at the end of Year 10 to relieve pressure on students at the end of Year 11. It was confirmed that this was a possibility, although levels of maturity and potential attainment would have to be taken into account. The process would have to be managed very carefully, but may help to relieve some of the pressure on students at the end of Year 11.

<p>1.5</p>	<p>Key Stage 3 levels The Government has indicated that Key Stage 3 levels will no longer be a measure from September. Parents were asked whether they found the current system of reporting levels useful.</p> <p>Parents indicated that they appreciated other grades on our reports, notably the effort and behaviour grades. They found these useful in assessing how hard their children were working. All understand that the levels are a good way of showing progress and most like them, though 1 parent made the point that students can become more obsessed with what level they are rather than on the skills they have. It was appreciated that this is something instilled in primary school and continued at secondary level.</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Homework Mr. Hodkinson informed parents that more and more homework was now being set on Frog. He stressed that this is a change of culture that will take time to be fully embedded. The general consensus was that Frog is a good system – parents like it. The question of how many parents don't have access to the internet was raised. Mr. Hodkinson agreed that a proportion of our students are unable to access Frog at home and shared with parents a list of venues/opportunities for students to do their Frog log ins (and homework) at school. We also have the "Hot Frogs" homework sessions at the community centre in Shakerley. Parents agreed that, although Frog is a definite improvement, they still have to remind their children to log on!</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Student Planner Parents were asked for their views on the current Planner. We are currently at the design stage for next year. 1 parent pointed out that she has not had a reply to messages in the Planner. 2-way communication is important and Mr. Hodkinson pointed out that Heads of Year were monitoring the use of Planners very carefully.</p> <p>One complaint – that there is not enough room for homework to be written in. Steps are being taken for next year's Planner to make more room for this.</p> <p>The general consensus was that Planners are useful - parents would NOT like to see everything become electronic/online. 1 parent said that she had initially been worried at the sheer volume of information in the Planner but had been impressed that her child knew the purpose of every page/ piece of information.</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Attendance and punctuality. Good news was shared - attendance and punctuality has improved further from last year. 96.44% attendance so far this year (this represents excellent attendance for a comprehensive school). Lates are also reduced. Mr. Hodkinson thanked parents for all their efforts in this regard and it was decided to issue a more general "thank you" in the Parent Newsletter.</p>

5 Feedback on school website

Parents present said that they really liked the new website. It was clear, informative and easy to navigate. We still need to arrange for staff photos (as appropriate) to be added but overall the website was vastly improved. Mrs Garretts thanked Mr. Gallimore and Mr. Sharpe for their work. Very positive feedback. Very easy to navigate and lots of information. Staff photos would be useful.

6 Any other business

Mr. Hodkinson thanked everyone for their attendance. Mr. Whalley, the new Deputy Head, will chair the next meeting.

Date and time of next meeting:

Thursday, 5 June at 6.00pm.