



13 December 2023

Dear Parents and Carers

At Ivybridge Community College, we know that under the right conditions every child can achieve academic outcomes that can empower them as adults to live successful lives of choice and opportunity. We also know that alongside the achievement of fantastic qualifications, a great education will support children to develop socially and emotionally, nurturing skills of resilience, respect, empathy and kindness. Such skills will support them to navigate the complexities of life with greater clarity and confidence.

We are aware of the current concerning trends being reported about the mental health of young people and whilst we are not expected to diagnose mental health conditions or perform mental health interventions, we strive to fulfil our responsibilities through the provision of a safe, supportive and purposeful learning environment.

This academic year, our staff and students have worked hard as a team to create a culture that provides all teachers and students the greatest opportunity to thrive and I write today to share an insight into some of the systems that are driving positive Teaching and Learning experiences in your child's classrooms. I appreciate the length of the letter and hope that the Christmas break will provide ample opportunities to read it at leisure.

All of the routines that we have implemented to date are informed by research and the experiences of some of the leading schools and colleges in the UK. These routines are based on core principles of reliability, clarity, predictability and efficiency that combine to support the wellbeing of both students and staff. In these schools, positive habits form quickly and as such students are able to access learning quickly, engage deeply, listen clearly, practice repeatedly and contribute confidently. Additionally, teachers are able to instruct effectively, support strategically and plan with greater efficiency.

To ensure your child has the best educational experiences and to support their wellbeing throughout the day, we have established the following routines:

Threshold

At Ivybridge Community College we welcome every student to classrooms to begin their learning. At the start of every lesson, our teachers stand at their classroom doors and greet students as they arrive. Students have reported that this has an extremely positive impact on their emotional preparation for lessons and that the predictable presence of staff at their classroom doors has made corridors feels safer than ever.

Silent Starters

We want every child to have the opportunity to feel success from the moment they enter a classroom. The Silent Starter is the first task that all students engage with in every lesson. Completed in silence, in order that the teacher can take an accurate register, this task provides an immediate opportunity for students to retrieve previously taught knowledge and thus strengthen their ability to recall information. Questions are strategically planned to ensure that all students can access the task and have immediate and repeated experiences of success. During this time, our teachers circulate their classrooms, providing subtle support and encouragement, gathering information of student understanding that is then used to guide

Respect ■ Aspiration ■ Integrity ■ Compassion

efficient feedback. Students have reported that their lessons start quickly and with purpose, with some sharing that the early opportunities for success provide a vitally important boost of confidence that can last an entire lesson.

Common Silencing Strategy

As educators, we know that children prosper when expectations are clear and routines are predictable. We believe that every child must be given the opportunity to receive instruction once and with clarity. One teacher may teach 150 students each day and each student may be taught by up to 9 different teachers throughout a week. To ensure that instructions can be delivered once and with clarity to all students, our teachers apply the same routine to achieve silence between each phase of learning. Silence allows children to hear their teachers when they share new knowledge, address whole-class misconceptions and provide important safety notices before practical tasks. Students share, that as a result of the Common Silencing Strategy, they are better able to understand what is expected of them and that their lessons run much more smoothly.

Disruption-Free Learning

We believe that every child has the right to learn free from the disruption caused by the poor choices of others. We also believe that teachers have the right to lead classrooms of calm purpose that allows them to focus their energy on teaching well. We achieve this by making the expectations of students and the standards of engagement to be achieved by them clear. We ensure that lessons are planned well and delivered with enthusiasm. We invest in our students personally to draw them into learning and develop their confidence, particularly when lesson content is challenging. We question strategically and non-invasively to showcase student successes, to address common misconceptions in understanding and to secure more deeply their understanding of knowledge. Where required, we use student-specific MyPlan documents to plan lessons, to inform instruction and to maximise the efficiency of additional learning support that may be assigned to students with Special Educational Needs.

We share repeatedly, during lessons, Assemblies and Tutor time why it is important for children to be able to learn free from disruption. We reassure students that warnings given for events of disruption are helpful reminders of what is expected and specifically not as indicators that they are in trouble in any way. Staff are trained to ensure that warnings are given clearly, accurately, predictably, with impartiality and with parity. Our professional development of staff prioritises the skills required to reach students with Special Educational Needs well to ensure that responses to disruption are appropriate, proportionate and accurate.

We know how important it is for children to make mistakes. Lessons are not the appropriate arena for poor behaviour choices to be explored in detail, as this would inevitably stall the learning of those engaging well and particularly compromise the access to learning of students with SEND. We use data collected throughout lessons to identify trends in student behaviour so that the appropriate support can be offered at the right time through consultation with parents and carers.

Importantly, "disruption-free", does not mean "silence all the time". The routines established at Ivybridge Community College give both staff and students greater control over their learning experience meaning that the learning of all students can proceed without interruption; Music can be recited with gusto, the nuances of Dance and Drama pieces are liberated, group work is effective, tools can be used safely and classroom discussions remain focussed on the content being taught.

Since refining our approach to ensure that lessons are free from disruption, students tell us that their "lessons fly by", "I've never written so much", "I can hear!", "It's so much easier to contribute", "It's ok to get it wrong", "lessons are more enjoyable when a minority of students aren't allowed to be disruptive", "I can answer questions that are asked knowing that the more confident children won't just shout out."

Silent Independent Practice

At Ivybridge Community College, we encourage all children to practice, not until they get something right, but until they cannot get it wrong. We know that students remember more and understand concepts with greater security when they practice. All lessons should offer all

students the opportunity to commit new knowledge to their long-term memories through dedicated phases of practice.

Silence is an important part of the learning cycle, as the working memory operates more efficiently when external distraction is removed and we trust our teachers to provide the appropriate conditions for effective practice specific to their subject. We used the word silence rather than quiet as expectations of quiet vary greatly from one person to another which can provide more confusion for many students.

Circulated Support

Lessons at Ivybridge Community College are pitched high to ensure that all students feel appropriately challenged in every lesson. We know that students respond effectively to increasing levels of challenge when they are supported and encouraged personally throughout their lessons. We also know that students acquire knowledge and understand concepts more securely and with greater accuracy when misconceptions are identified and addressed as they occur. During times of questioning and independent practice, our teachers move purposefully around the classrooms removing barriers, pre-empting task-related frustration, supporting excellent student behaviour and gathering accurate information about what students know and do not know. As such, teachers are able to adjust their teaching as needs emerge to ensure that all students continue to make progress and feel successful. Seating Plans, informed by student-specific needs and peer group dynamics provide a route of effective support that further increases the impact of their interactions with students. Students share, that, as a result of circulated support, they are able to resolve problems more quickly, are more confident to contribute to whole-class discussions, complete much more work and very importantly, are more willing to make mistakes.

Silent Paired Transitions

We do not believe that children should walk between lessons or to lessons from breaktimes in silence as we feel that `corridor time` provides an opportunity for healthy debrief and discussion between students after and en route to lessons. We do believe that all lessons should be protected, where possible, from external disruption as we understand the effort required of teachers and students to re-establish calm and purposeful learning environments if students pass their classrooms noisily.

We know that where not addressed, lessons can be significantly disrupted when groups of students move through corridors from classrooms, Tutor rooms and changing rooms to IT suites, Assemblies, gymnasiums and other alternative learning spaces. Fulfilling the objective of calm, purposeful and safe corridors and disruption-free learning experiences for our students is most efficient when done in pairs, in silence and with purpose; a replication of the already established and brilliantly executed mechanism of student movement during a fire drill.

Students and staff leave classrooms together and arrive at their destination together to ensure the safeguarding of all children and to ensure the learning of other children in lessons passed along the way is not disrupted.

I hope that this information provides a useful insight to routines that are used to facilitate both student progress and their enjoyment of learning.

Yours faithfully

Tim Cresswell

Deputy Principal for Curriculum and Teaching and Learning