

December 2023

Dear Parents/Carers

Firstly, I would like to thank everyone who completed the recent survey. Your views and feedback matter hugely to us and we plan to revisit this survey half-termly, with additional questions about areas that we would like to consult on.

There were many positives in the survey as well as some key areas that we need to work on. Some key highlights include:

- Significant numbers of parents/carers think we have high expectations of the students (68%), with only 18% thinking our expectations are not high enough.
- A significant majority of you feel that your child does well at Longsands (69%)
- 84% feel there are a good range of extra-curricular activities on offer; and
- 69% are confident that the school lets them know how their child is getting on.

These are encouraging results and areas that we want to build on. However, the survey also highlighted some areas where we need to do further work. For example, 34% of parents/carers felt that when they have raised concerns it has not been dealt with properly and 35% do not feel that the school supports their child's wider personal development. We will explore this further at a future parent forum.

Our communication with you

There were also feelings expressed about behaviour and culture processes and current communication from the academy. Both these areas are intertwined with some people expressing a desire to receive more communication about changes to the way we do things because they do not feel informed about the changes or the rationale behind them.

The survey also highlights some misunderstandings about expectations around behaviour and the culture we are trying to promote at Longsands. To address both these areas we will be creating additional opportunities to share with parents/carers what we do every day to provide insights into daily life at school.

Some parents/carers (38%) said that they were not clear what their children are currently learning at school, and an immediate change we are making is to update the website with half-termly summaries by year group to make it clear what students are studying at Longsands.

In addition, from the week ending 8 December we will be introducing a weekly Principal's letter & vlog to share current news and information about what is happening now and what is going to happen in the future to complement the Longsands monthly newsletter, which will continue to showcase students' work and achievements. The newsletter itself will be getting a revamp in the new year as we have invited some of our talented students to get involved in producing it.

We have also decided to take the parent/carer forum online via Teams so that more people are able to attend. We will also be introducing regular school tours starting on Friday 8 December. If you would be interested in attending, please complete the MS form here: <https://forms.office.com/e/36D66ZuFAH>

To streamline and improve communication with parents/carers we would ask that any issues or concerns/problems are sent to enquiries@astrea-longsands.org or you call the main switchboard so we can ensure that all issues are addressed in a timely manner. Please note that it will no longer be possible to send messages via the MCAS App.

Behaviour

Some parents/carers raised concerns about behaviour in the toilets and corridors. Ensuring that all students feel safe is one of our key priorities. In the latest student survey of over 700 students, 88% said they felt safe at school and those who felt less safe mentioned toilets, corridors and queuing.

We have worked very hard to put into place strategies to manage the corridors at key transition points in the school day. We have added lines down the centre of corridors to ensure that students walk sensibly on the left-hand side and also purple spots at key places to indicate where we would like staff to stand to manage the movement of students.

Lesson changeover is a very busy time that requires careful management as we have over 1700 students and staff moving at the same time in relatively narrow corridors. I want to be clear that we do not expect silence at all, but we do of course discourage rowdy and boisterous behaviour. Students and staff are often heard greeting each other as they walk past. We do encourage students to move to their next lesson quickly so that they don't miss out on valuable learning time, and students who arrive late without a good reason or note are issued with a consequence.

Use of toilets

We encourage students to use the toilet facilities during break and lunchtimes rather than during lessons; again to avoid them missing out on learning time. Exceptions are made for students with medical toilet passes or in an emergency, and our staff use their professional judgement and knowledge of the child to make this judgement if they do ask to go to the toilet during lesson time.

There are plenty of toilets available to students at break and lunch time, and we are particularly proud of the new unisex toilets in H block, which many students prefer as the cubicles are full enclosed. For those students who prefer to go to single gender toilets these are also available, and we have a day cleaner who regularly ensures the cleanliness of all toilets throughout the school day.

Rewards system

Some parents/carers have said that students are worried about the behaviour policy and getting into trouble and this is affecting their enjoyment at school. We try to communicate regularly to students that the systems we have in place are designed to support them in getting it right. Both the morning welcome and the tutor time equipment check is an opportunity for students to ensure that their uniform is correct, and they have what they need to learn that day.

No student will be issued with a consequence for forgetting a pen or a calculator occasionally and where possible key equipment, such as pens, will be loaned to students so that they don't have to disrupt their learning or the learning of others to ask for key equipment.

We believe it is important that students take responsibility for organising themselves and tutors are there to support them on developing this life skill. Rewarding students for 'getting it right' whether by going the extra mile in lessons, being kind and respectful or consistently coming to school with a positive attitude and working hard are the cornerstone of our behaviour policy.

We work hard to spot and reward these behaviours and looking back over the last few months since the start of term, there have been 21 times more house points than there have been behaviour points. It was particularly

lovely to see 165 students receive their first house badge for gaining more than 50 points, and we are expecting significantly more students to receive theirs this time around.

Like some parents/carers who mentioned this in the survey, we were unhappy about the overly punitive nature of the character cards. As part of work on professional development, we chose to focus on supporting staff in identifying opportunities to capture positive behaviour on the card and already we are seeing the impact of this - last week there was a noticeable increase in the number of positives signatures. Students with three positive signatures can claim a small bag of sweets on their way out of school, which as you can imagine has been very popular!

Teacher agency

Finally, I would like to address the issue that some parents/carers raised that the leadership team are limiting teachers' agency to plan and deliver lessons and undermining their professionalism. This is not the case. However, as a school we are committed to applying the best practices to support the young people in our care to learn effectively.

We are working towards having a common language around teaching to reduce the 'cognitive load' (all the different things students have to think about) so that all learners can focus on learning the content of the lesson. For example, we ask that teachers using mini white boards in the same way, so students don't have to think about how each teacher likes to use them but instead know that at Longsands we do it this way.

We also ask that we, as teaching professionals, direct questions at students rather than take the answer from the first student who puts their hands up. In the education system, this approach is called *cold calling*, but in most lessons we 'warm it up' by giving students reflection time, time to discuss with their partners or even a chance first to write down their answers. These prove techniques support all students in learning, particularly vulnerable learners.

I hope I have addressed some of the issues raised and I look forward to welcoming you to one of the many events that we organise at school. At the core of every great school is great partnership working with parents and carers, and we are keen to develop our engagement with you over the coming months and terms. And on that note, I would like to remind parents/carers that there is a parent/carer workshop on *Understanding the Teenage Brain* from 6pm to 7pm on Thursday 7 December. Please indicate if you will be attending so that we can ensure there is enough seating by completing and submitting this MS Form:

<https://forms.office.com/e/kfe2kR00Fy>

Yours faithfully



Dr C Cusick
Principal