

13 January 2017

Dear parents/carers

### **Update at the end of my first full week at Murrayfield**

I write to say thank you for the warm welcome which I have received from both you, the parents and carers, and also from the pupils. I have been really impressed by the pupils' willingness to learn and their enthusiasm for asking and answering questions. Your children are wonderful!

I provide, below, key updates on issues which have arisen and decisions which have been taken since our return to school.

#### *First names*

I am a strong believer that relationships between pupils and staff need to be warm and professional. Based on my experience with Paradigm's London primary schools, I believe that a key way to achieve this is for both pupils and staff to address each other by their first names. Rest assured, this is in no way intended to undermine the fact that pupils are required to obey the directions provided by adults in school. Rather, it is a public and constant demonstration/reminder that adults and pupils are working together to ensure that pupils make rapid progress.

#### *PE/swimming kit*

All pupils have now been reminded/told by their teachers when PE/swimming is currently taking place. It is very important that pupils have the correct kit/equipment in school. I am currently reviewing the scheduling of PE and swimming and, as soon as a new timetable is confirmed, I will send this out, in good time for parents/carers to respond to any changes.

#### *Academy council*

As a school which is part of Paradigm Trust, Murrayfield will not have a local governing body. Instead, formal governance responsibilities are held by the directors of Paradigm Trust, who meet at least monthly – and often more regularly – and will consider Murrayfield's performance at each of their meetings.

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However, directors do believe that it is important that parents/carers have a formal opportunity to communicate with the principal, and the Board. For this reason, I will, by the end of the spring term, constitute an academy council for Murrayfield. The council is intended to facilitate communication with the principal and may:

- ask questions of the principal about the operation of the academy and its performance
- raise issues of concern with the principal about the operation of the academy
- provide papers to the directors or their committees.

In addition, elected councillors may attend the annual Trust conference and/or the academy's training days. The directors will consult with academy councils on specified topics, or more broadly if they so desire. All parents/carers are welcome to attend council meetings, regardless of whether they have been elected. More information will be provided in due course.

### *Litter*

I believe that pupils deserve a clean and tidy school in which to learn. I understand that significant improvements have already been made in terms of litter reduction. I have spoken to the pupils to remind them of the importance of putting rubbish in bins and, more generally, keeping the school tidy e.g. picking up coats which are not on pegs. I do not require pupils to pick up litter without the appropriate equipment (e.g. gloves and a litter picker 'arm') unless they themselves have been observed to drop it in the first place. There may be occasions when pupils are required to pick up litter as a consequence for poor/anti social behaviour which lets down the school community. In such cases, however, the appropriate equipment will be provided. I would be very open to the possibility of working with parents/carers/the Murrayfield Friends Association to conduct a litter pick of the site and improve the school environment for the pupils – please contact me if you would like to be involved.

### *Review of the quality of learning and teaching*

As you may have heard from your child, over the past few days there have been a lot of visitors to the school. I have commissioned an external review of the quality of learning and teaching at Murrayfield. This will provide me with an impartial view of the school's strengths and its weaknesses. I, together with senior staff, will then put together a plan which will address the areas for improvement, including the provision of significant and varied support opportunities for staff. This will, on occasion, mean that staff are



absent from the classroom to enable them to participate in training opportunities. I know that this is not ideal but I believe it is very important that staff receive such training and I will always do my best to ensure that staff are covered as well as possible.

As part of my review of standards across the school, I have directed teachers to test all children in Y1-6 in reading and mathematics. Assessments of writing will follow in due course. Pupils in reception and nursery are also being constantly assessed, although they themselves will probably not be aware of this. Once the tests/assessments have been marked and checked, I will report to you on your child's current learning, in a way which is very clear and leaves you in no doubt as to your child's current performance. We will carry out formal assessments at least three times a year and these will enable teachers to identify what pupils need to learn next.

### *Behaviour*

I have been, in general, very impressed by the standard of behaviour at the school. In time, I will review the praise and consequences systems but, for now, I am content to leave these as they are. As such, when pupils exceed expectations they achieve 'praises'. There are five praises available to pupils each day. If a pupil receives a 'praise 5', for exceptional learning and behaviour, s/he is awarded a medal, which is presented in an assembly, to which parents/carers are invited. If pupils choose not to follow the school rules, causing disruption to their own or others' learning, they are given 'consequences'. If a pupil receives a 'consequence 3' or 'consequence 4' s/he will spend a short period of time in another classroom. If a pupil receives a 'consequence 5', s/he is spoken to by the principal and his/her parent/carer is informed.

Paradigm Trust follows the prevailing guidance from the Department for Education in terms of the use of physical restraint. The following information is taken direct from that guidance:

All school staff have a power to use force. Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder. Schools can use reasonable force to:

- remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so;
- prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit;



- prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others;
- prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground; and
- restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

Principals and other authorised staff can also use such force as is reasonable given the circumstances to conduct a search for prohibited items.

### *Keeping in touch*

I and colleagues are regularly available in the playground at the start and end of the day and would welcome the chance to talk with you and your children, including to discuss any questions, concerns or anxieties you may have.

Yours faithfully

**Amanda Phillips CBE**

Principal