

Parents' Forum

24th June 2010

Summary

Thirty-three parents attended. The notes below summarise the discussions of each group and highlight some of the points raised. These notes will go to the Governing Body and to the School Leadership Team for further discussion. A version of the points will be discussed by pupils at the School Council.

These contributions will then be included, where appropriate, in the School Development Plan for 2010-11.

GROUP 1

Facilitator: Mrs E Wain

Governor: Mrs E Roche

6 parents from Y7 and Y10

Homework and The Knowledge

- Explanation of Preparatory work from the Head Master at Parents' Forum has provided better clarification.
- Discrepancies between different departments is a concern.
- Some of the language used in The Knowledge not pupil/parent friendly.
- Clearer communication of topics so Parents can support at home.
- Request for a further Parents Meeting for parents of Y7 later in the first term to specifically look at The Knowledge.
- Generally supportive of the approach of preparatory work.
- Concerns raised over absence, gaps in knowledge, how is this addressed if they are constantly moving on to the next topic?
- Would like to be able to see assessments, not necessarily tests but written/created pieces of work to gain a greater sense of the levels boys are achieving and what they need to do to improve.
- Very supportive of the notion of regular assessment and the focus that gives to the pupils.

Vocational Pathways

- Happy with current courses offered as it gives the school its identity, providing courses for a minority who benefit, sticking to the traditional offer for the majority.
- Emphasis should be on the pupils being able to make a choice.
- IGCSE mentioned by one parent, others did not concur – need to be comprehensive.

Behaviour and Discipline

- Boys generally exemplary behaviour noted and appreciated.
- Problems are taken seriously and acted upon by the school.
- SLT have a real compassion so consequences are always in proportion.
- All procedures are very clear so teachers, pupils and parents all know where they stand.

Other

- All astonished at the lack of attendance by parents at this evening's Parents' Forum.

- Felt the Head's presentation really clarified areas such as attainment/achievement and issues raised by Ofsted.
- Overall extremely positive and supportive of the school.

GROUP 2

Facilitator: Mr D Boyse

Governor: Mr M Orbell

5 parents from Y7, Y9, Y10 and Y11

Attainment and Achievement and Homework

- Generally positive comments about fortnightly assessments and how these can motivate boys, as well as the information on The Knowledge and how home learning can help boys with supportive parents.
- Half-termly report cards very helpful, much discussion re the use of red as it was felt that, with high target grades, this demotivates some boys. There was acceptance that the visual nature of the use of colour was striking and that you can't just end up with a plethora of different colours.
- General lack of understanding of target grades and the disparity between subjects for the same boy.
- Greater clarity required for Y7 parents especially as to the school system for grading, target setting, homework policy etc. Would be helpful for briefing notes from parent information evenings to be available on the website.
- Parents concerned about the lack of marking in exercise books and really want a policy on this and a minimum expectation of feedback in books on how to progress.
- The Knowledge is not visually pleasing and a turn-off for visual learners.

Vocational Pathways

- Parents have found the variety of potential options bewildering. All wanted there to be a choice offered to boys by the College.
- General agreement that they had chosen the College and that their son being taught at the College was very important to them.
- SEN Department in particular was praised.

Communication and Consultation

- Head Master's half-termly newsletter and website very successful.
- Generally positive feedback in HoL responses to dealing with issues.
- All the PSAs were praised.
- Y7 parents felt that only one parents' evening in the year wasn't enough and were keen for there to be at least one more.

Behaviour and Discipline

- One parent suggested that the system was too harsh and inflexible for certain SEN students.
- There was general support for the way the College manages discipline and behaviour matters.

Other

- A concern about the Ofsted comments of the English Department.
- Lack of clarity on how parents can pay for food. Do we have *ParentPay*, for example?

- Overall there is lots of confidence in the school!

Group 3

Facilitator: Mr P Cargill

Governor: Mrs N Kerr

5 parents from Y7, Y8 and Y11

Raising Achievement

- Better communication when targets were amended (by HOL or others).
- Better communication over importance of GCSE modular tests – they felt they did not know significance or weighting of tests in some subjects.
- Some schools have a summer reading list (particularly for Y6 going into Y7).

Marking and Homework

- Concern over the fact that some exercise books are not marked.
- Pupils do require feedback.
- Majority agreed the fortnightly assessment to be a good thing.
- One parent felt that all homeworks should be marked as well as assessments.
- Some suggested rebranding homework and for this to be applied consistently by staff/school so as change perceptions of what the 'homework' is.

Communication and Consultation

- All agreed that communication was excellent on the whole.
- Concern over issues such as when a sports fixture is cancelled and all parents need to be contacted.
- Could school explore signing up to a parent mail scheme where parents are automatically sent e-mail/text when there is a development at school?

Sixth Form Funding

- No views, understood situation.

Behaviour and Discipline

- Wanted to know who the complaining parents were!
- Disagreed totally with Ofsted judgement on the school.

Vocational Pathways

- No strong views either way, generally thought it was a good thing though good to have pathway into Sixth Form rather than go elsewhere.

Other

- Security – anybody could walk off the street and bypass reception. Was this not a security risk?

Group 4

Facilitator: Ms C Mehta

7 parents from Y7 and Y9

Attainment and Achievement

- Delighted with Head Master's presentation and the clarification it brought.
- Also annoyed with Ofsted judgements on the school.

Marking and Homework

- Parents did not like the change from the traditional system. They did not see increased benefit. Some believed they did not see enough hard work going on.
- General consensus they felt more positive about it now that they understood it. They would consider giving it another chance to see if their understanding improved their perception of the homework/marking scenario for next year.
- Teachers at parents' evening should be using the grade book to give feedback and parents would stand a better chance of getting to grips with it earlier.
- There was a consensus concern on students who are bright and capable of "winging" tests. How are we stretching them? They never do any homework which causes conflict at home. Parents not convinced children of certain abilities were challenged.
- Exercise books must be looked at. If only to ensure standards of presentation and continual errors were corrected. It was not felt that this happened and parents strongly felt it should.
- Target grades changing as a result of achievement was not seen as positive, but detrimental (Y7).
- Parents would really like a specific role - what are our expectations of parents' involvement with homework? - how can they truly help? Please can we tell them the password to the knowledge as their sons won't!
- There was a minority view that school should deal with homework not parents.

Sixth Form Funding

- Happy to support the school when asked, e.g. extra Sixth Form places.
- Absolute agreement from parents who wrote their own letters and others who would have but did not know what to say, that a pro forma issued from the school would be excellent.

Communication and Consultation

- Information at Forum was good - how helpful it would have been to have it at the beginning of the year.
- Very strongly felt that they wanted to know how to use The Knowledge and help their sons from the beginning. That presentation should be at the parents' briefing at the start of Y7.
- The Parents' Forum should be earlier in the year; they thought more people would come. Communication was good but should be better e.g. texting and emails- get the digital design class to do mailshots- was one suggestion!
- Heads of Line and PSAs – brilliant!

Behaviour and Discipline

- Total support and be harder.

Vocational Pathways

- Some disappointment expressed about Y9 boys are encouraged to go for it, then don't get it. The College is an academic school and should stick with what it knows best.
- Parents need an informed choice and to understand what the FE options actually are and would probably be willing to go with them.
- 14 was considered too young to be deciding. Prefer to get them to 16, then decide. Boys want to be part of the school until then.

Other

- Too much deodorant used in Y7 PE/games- boys saying they are finding it hard to breathe!

Group 5

Facilitator: Mr J Lonergan

6 parents from Y7-11

Achievement and Attainment

- Need for Study Skills sessions
- Lack of focus in Y9 without SAT exams
- Core Science modules – too much all in one go
- Sometimes unclear which part of The Knowledge preparatory work was classwork / homework

Marking and Homework

- Parents were keen to enforce use of diaries to write in homework – not just “See Knowledge”.
- Teachers to use diaries to flag up problems.

Sixth Form Funding

- This issue is never raised at UHS – is problem unique to Wimbledon College?
- Are there other sources of funding to explore?
- What would the optimum size of the 6th Form be?

Vocational Pathways

- Parents keen on a vocation offer which left 6th Form open as an option
- Guidance for parents about the courses to be offered at Y9
- Recommended visiting professionals to talk to younger students
- Positive about the extra-curricular GCSE offer

Behaviour and Discipline

- All very supportive of current policy

Other

- Rewards – Commendation certificates are valued.
- Good amount of verbal praise given to boys.
- Appreciative of revision classes.
- Concern about site security – discussed gates and ID Badges.
- Discussed practice of some school to team up and share expertise at GCSE level targeting specific groups of students A*/A , C/D borders.

Group 6

Facilitators: Mr M Ventom and Mr M Hartland

4 parents from Y9 and Y10

Attainment and Achievement

- Y10 modular GCSEs a cause of concern – boys don't realise seriousness.
- Parents' start-of-year briefings are 'too vague'.
- Y9 modular GCSEs a concern: parents said they didn't know they were happening / didn't know they were real GCSEs / didn't believe sons when they said they were real GCSEs; are they the best thing for boys in Y9? Will the results encourage or discourage?
- Need for departments to produce exam revision lists.
- Can study skills be taught lower down the school?
- Staff praised and thanked for their commitment to Supported Study.
- Why end of year exams Y10 as well as modular GCSE exams (nb parent supported! It was the boy who was complaining!).
- Are fortnightly assessments too frequent? Can there be more project-based assessment?
- Might SEN boys be stressed by assessments? Or do they rise to them?
- Red on half-termly reports is too extreme – can a more nuanced colour scheme be used?

Sixth Form

- Presence of UHS pupils in 6th form supported by parents.
- 'Will my son get a place in 6th form?' – anxiety about limited places / funding.

Vocational Pathways

- WC's traditional approach appreciated by parents.
- If pupils want vocational courses they can go somewhere else.
- WC can't be Jack of all trades and master of none.
- Child needs 'general' education (i.e. traditional) not vocational, especially pre-16.

Communication and Consultation

- Parents need to understand how website works.
- Parents need reassurance they can contact Head of Line about anything: please can email and telephone numbers be given? Parents sometimes worry about bothering us.
- Experience of secondary parents in Y7 feeling distant – needing reassurance OK to contact school.
- PSAs praised.

Behaviour and Discipline

- Discipline is needed in a boys school – it should be 'hard and heavy'!
- One parent's son was excluded for a day – it was shocking for him – but it worked!
- Boys learn from strong discipline.
- Unruly boys can be dangerous.
- Boys feel safe with WC's discipline procedures. Boys know 'if he does it again he'll be excluded' (e.g. bullying).
- The system is clear and accepted.
- Some concern about how boys behave on way home from school.

Other

- Concern about quality of food - parents' committee to investigate?