



PONTELAND HIGH SCHOOL

Aiming for our students to be happy, feel safe and secure, and achieve exceptionally well

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Dear Parents

Last week, in our Weekly Bulletin to parents, I indicated that I would write this week outlining some of our planning for September 2019 when we welcome our new year 7 and 8 cohorts on to our current school site.

Background

As you will be aware, despite Northumberland County Council (NCC) working closely with local and national partners, and regular contact with central Government, the delay during the referral of the planning decision for the new school and leisure complex to the National Casework Planning Unit did have an impact on timescales. NCC highlighted this at that time, and made an application for temporary accommodation on the high school site accordingly.

You may have seen the recent press release from NCC regarding the decision to re-tender the school and leisure build project and NCC are confident that through re-tendering they will guarantee the best value for money for our residents and communities, allow further time for environmental preparations on the proposed site, and meet the shortest possible timescales for completion of the project. NCC are making rapid progress on re-tendering the contract, with invitation to tender having already been sent out with the formal procurement process starting on Monday 2 July 2018; in addition, NCC officers are holding a Bidders Day for potential contractors today.

School perspective

During the consultation on moving to a primary-secondary school model I was repeatedly asked by parents if it was the new build that was the driving factor in our decision to support the change to 11-18. My answer then is the same as today; I would have advocated changing to 11-18 even without the new build, as the key educational issue is promoting curriculum continuity from year 7-11 and ensuring subject specialists set students on the right path from year 7. The prospect of a new building is an added bonus and not the key factor.

Our educational aim is to provide students with a strong foundation on which to build as they enter their important GCSE years. It is clear that those who are with us in years 7 and 8 will have a distinct advantage over any students joining the school at the start of year 9 as they will be settled in the school and familiar with our staff and established ways of working.

So, in September 2019 we will welcome our new year 7 and 8 cohorts for the first time as we begin life as a newly formed 11-18 secondary school. We will do so on our current site and are committed to making a success of this. I am sure that parents will have many questions about how this will work in practice therefore I have outlined some key issues to hopefully address many of these.





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Temporary accommodation

It is not the case that a particular year group would be based in the temporary accommodation. In all likelihood we will alter our departmental layout in light of our additional accommodation and re-design where each department is based within the school. It may be that, for example, we move our Maths department en masse into the new temporary accommodation; this means that all students from Y7-13 would visit these classrooms when they had Maths lessons. As such, no year group is favoured over another and this reflects the approach taken for the new build where we have planned for departments to operate within geographical clusters.

Year 7 organisation

Year 7 Form Tutors will form a team however the staff will come from different curriculum areas. As such, it is highly likely that a year 7 tutor base could be located in a classroom either side of, for example, a 6th form tutor group and Y10 tutor group. This approach, which is modelled in all secondary schools, ensures that younger students are fully integrated into the life of the school.

Continuity and relationships

When year 7 and 8 students join our school they will be allocated a Form Tutor within a year group. Each year group is overseen by a team of two individuals; a Pastoral Leader and Pastoral Manager. These important people will stay with the year group as they progress from year 7 to 11 enabling them to get to know students and their parents very well. Additionally, our Form Tutors also stay with their tutor group from year 7 to 11. We believe this approach enhances our knowledge and understanding of the individuality of our students and will be hugely valuable as they approach key milestones in their school career.

Pastoral offices

We intend to locate the pastoral offices for Y7-9 where we currently house Y9-11. This means that KS3 Pastoral Leaders/Managers are close to the main reception area and near senior leader offices. Y10 and 11 Pastoral offices will relocate to another area within school towards the back of the building.

Transition

Transition activities for the current year 5 children have been hosted at the current high school site during this academic year (2017-18) so the pupils are already becoming familiar with the layout of these buildings and the staff. We will continue with termly visits to the high school in year 6 (2018-19) so that pupils will be very much at ease in their surroundings when they arrive here as our year 7 students in September 2019.

Teachers

One of the key drivers for moving to a 11-18 school was that we can timetable subject specialists from year 7 onwards; these staff also teach GCSE and A level so have a deep knowledge of their subject curriculum. Our year 7 and 8 students will have 1-2 years working in school with these teachers before they embark on their core GCSE subjects (English Language, English Literature, Maths, Science, MFL and RE) from year 9 before then taking up additional option subjects from year 10.





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Rooms and current spare capacity

We operate a 2-week timetable with 25 x 1 hr lessons each week. Every time we have a lesson students are accommodated in a dedicated teaching space however we also have at least 13 spare teaching areas, and often as many as 20 spare areas per timetabled lesson. This spare capacity enables us to have a degree of flexibility in how we make use of our resources.

When year 7 and 8 join the school we will inevitably use some of this capacity however we are also adding the additional 10 temporary classrooms to ensure we retain a degree of surplus capacity as required in a secondary environment. It is worth noting that the temporary accommodation is unlike the 'mobiles' that you and I may remember from our school days - the modern versions are very different and much more pleasant!

Social spaces

Internal social spaces are minimal in most schools and not planned for in new builds however we intend to identify discrete areas, both within the current building and outside as designated areas for year 7 during unstructured times such as break and lunch time. The Y7 students would not have to stay in these areas during social time but could use them should they wish to.

Lunch time

We do not intend to engineer a 'split lunch' system in 2019-20; instead we are leaning towards a timed sitting arrangement. For example, one week the early lunch sitting will be for year 7 and 8 with years 9-11 arriving for lunch after, say 20 mins; the next week roles will be reversed with years 9-11 having the first sitting followed by years 7 and 8. In addition, we intend arranging for additional serveries around the school where students can buy cold food and drinks rather than having to do so within the dining hall, which will increasingly become the destination for hot food only.

PE facilities

Due to the nature of our school site we have always shared a Sports Hall with Ponteland Middle School with the high school having access from 9.15am-1.35pm each day. The only lesson of the day we do not have access is during the last lesson of the day, i.e. 2.25pm-3.25pm. The plan for 2019-20 is to have discrete access to the Sports Hall in the Leisure Centre with the intention of timetabling year 10 and 11 for these lessons rather than the younger age groups. This arrangement will enhance our current provision and enable us to continue to provide a full PE curriculum.

I hope that this has answered many of the questions that parents may have at this time but please do contact me should you wish to discuss any lingering queries. I am absolutely convinced that the proposed change to 11-18 will be very successful and that our new students will take the changes in their stride. Rest assured that we will do all we can to ensure that it is successful and will continue to keep you updated on developments.

Yours faithfully

Kieran McGrane

Headteacher

