

Ref: DD / PW
Date: 6th October 2009

Dear Parent / Carer,

I write to pass comment upon the letter "College behaviour – opinion" published in the October issue of the Sedgefield News, that I am sure a number of parents have read.

Firstly, I am disappointed that a letter with no factual basis would be printed without first providing the college the opportunity to respond. I am sure that parents of students attending the college will have been justifiably concerned by the inaccurate and misleading comments when printed in isolation with no response from the college. I have asked that in future the editor takes account of the possible anxiety caused to parents before printing such a letter without comment from the college.

The writer insists that he / she is "reliably informed" that there are "areas where students sensitive to bullying should avoid" calling them no go areas and goes on to name the college canteen and toilets as examples. It would be naive of anyone to think that bullying does not take place in any school on occasions and Sedgefield Community College is no different, however we have in place an anti-bullying policy and clear procedures for students to report bullying and I am of the opinion that we address this issue well. As to the suggestion that the college canteen and toilets are hot spots for this type of activity this is simply untrue, in fact this term we have adjusted our lunch time routines to provide healthier food options, more activities for students and increased levels of supervision and as a result we have figures which suggest more students are using the college canteen. In addition we now have staff assigned to manage the toilets during lunch breaks to ensure that they are well maintained and that particularly younger students can feel more confident using the facilities at busy times.

The suggestion that we insist that students "sit in exclusion in form rooms" during lunch time is also completely inaccurate. Since returning from the summer break we have begun to introduce year zones around the school to provide students with somewhere to go should they wish, these include IT suites, games rooms and rooms where students can go simply to chat with friends if they wish. These were not introduced as a reaction to alleged bullying rather simply to provide students with choice as to how they spend their lunch breaks, within a safe supervised setting.

The author of the letter goes on to claim computer screens have been cracked and keyboards smeared with chewing gum, this again is untrue, along with the statement that a toilet seat had been ripped out and thrown from a window! Each of these statements suggest wide scale disruption which is far from reality. I am deeply disappointed that parents have been given such a misleading impression of a school which contrary to the claims made in the letter has made significant progress in ensuring that students can enjoy their education in a calm and safe environment.

Finally, I would like to reassure parents that whilst I am well aware that student behaviour can be improved, the college described in the Sedgefield News bears no resemblance to reality. Further myself, governors and the college staff are committed to driving the necessary improvement to ensure that students are provided with the continually improving conditions that will allow them to succeed.

Yours sincerely

Dave Davies
Headteacher