



THE BUCKINGHAM SCHOOL

A SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE

London Road
Buckingham
MK18 1AT

Tel: 01280 812206

Fax: 01280 822525

Email: office@buckinghamschool.org

Website: www.buckinghamschool.org

Headteacher: Mr A McGinnes

29 April 2022

Dear Parents and Carers

Behaviour and safety outside of school in Buckingham and the villages

It is the time of year when the weather starts to make us feel more optimistic about times to come. In spring of 2022, we have a less dangerous variant of Covid-19 amongst us, and a summer of few restrictions lies ahead.

Our students – your children – will be feeling the same. They have had a very different childhood experience in the last two years. They will be looking forward to a long hot summer in Buckingham, Steeple Claydon, Padbury, Tingewick, or wherever they are lucky enough to live in the beautiful county of Buckinghamshire. They have a great place to grow up.

However, we need to be more honest about the risks in our community, the town and villages, and the normal routines that place children at risk. Mental health concerns are greater than ever, and certainly more so than before the pandemic. Teenagers have been impacted and these risks are even more critical.

Both Buckingham secondary schools recognise their responsibility to encourage their students to act as good citizens in their communities. I have discussed a joint approach with Mr Hudson, Headteacher at The Royal Latin School, and we will continue to work in partnership to promote high standards.

What should the community be concerned about?

Unsupervised gatherings of the community's children, ranging from on their way home from school, through to late at night at the weekends, are placing some children in direct danger.

They can be in danger because what they are doing is dangerous and/or illegal. They can also be vulnerable to hazing, or even grooming. These are where the building of any relationship with a young person, which intends to allow them to manipulate, humiliate, endanger, exploit or abuse them.

It's not just grooming or gangs, however. Some of the community's children are just behaving badly at times, and engaging in behaviours that we wouldn't want to accept. Like it or not, there is behaviour in the community which raises very serious concerns, including:

- Underage drinking, vaping, smoking, and children using cannabis
- Possession and dealing of cannabis
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Violence including serious assault
- Anti-social behaviour including vandalism
- Bullying via social media

The Buckingham School is concerned that every student should have the opportunity to attend school activities/obtain equipment, regardless of their financial circumstances. As such, it may be possible to subsidise those students who would otherwise be unable to attend trips/purchase items. Please feel free to write in confidence to finance@buckinghamschool.org, if you wish to seek assistance, or obtain more information about Pupil Premium funding.



To be clear, this does not refer to students of any one school specifically. There are young adults involved, as well as school-age children. The Buckingham School is growing and flourishing, and more and more students are making it their first choice, but the town and village communities are served by many schools. The concern is that community children are involved, not which school they attend.

That said, we should be under no illusion that some students at our school are directly involved or caught up in these incidents, or are witnessing them.

What are we doing about it?

The Buckingham School continues to educate and safeguard children by teaching them about personal safety and risk through the Personal Development curriculum, the work of our Student First Team and through events such as our Year 9 drop-down day, our anti-bullying work with Equaliteach, the imminent visit of Beyond Equality and so much more. Schools need to have strong and supportive relationships with local agencies to provide students with access to support beyond school. We know that our local partner schools do the same.

What can our community do?

Parents can do three simple things to promote the safety of their children:

1. Talk to your child about these issues in a way that you feel to be appropriate, based on their age. Some young people can do crazy things. If we leave them unsupervised, if we don't know where they are, if we don't know what they are getting up to, we are less sure of their safety.
2. Ask for help if you are not sure how to approach this topic. There is excellent support available for parents from organisations such as Mind. This website provides good examples of ways to approach difficult conversations with teenagers and further links to other resources that will help parents.
3. Contact us. If you have safety concerns for your child, we want to help.

The Buckingham School believes that our young people are fantastic. They need coaching, not criticising. They deserve support and love. We want to reassure you that we continue to see the best in the local teenagers and young people. We know that they are ambitious, confident, curious, full of empathy and integrity, resilient and respectful. We love working with them. This letter reflects our stated commitment to do more and to say more to keep them all safe.

Yours sincerely,



Mr A McGinnes

Headteacher

aallen@buckinghamschool.org

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Supplementary Information – Concerns Regarding Vaping

The School is becoming increasingly concerned about the rising use of vapes. We are aware that a handful of students are vaping at school, and it is much more difficult to track than smoking. Therefore, we would suspect that those same students could be vaping at home, and certainly in the community.

We are sorry to say that students have been purchasing these products from shops in the local area and online. We are sure you are as concerned as we are, as to the ease of which students can access these products without any age identification requests being made.

The legal age to buy vapes in the UK is 18 years old. The law which made it illegal to sell e-cigarettes or vape juice to anyone under 18 came into force on 1 October 2015. Smoking, which now includes the use of electronic cigarettes (vaping), has been illegal in all indoor (and some outdoor) public places since 2007.

As a school, we treat vaping the same as cigarettes, in line with our Behaviour Policy; vaping in school will lead to suspension.

Health Risks

We are also aware that some parents are of the opinion that vaping is relatively harmless, certainly when compared to smoking. However, in history, we have discovered quite consistently that filling our lungs with chemicals or foreign bodies is very bad for our health (cigarette smoke, pollution, asbestos, radon gas, to name but a few).

Electronic cigarettes (E-cigarettes) can contain high levels of nicotine. Adolescence is a critical period for brain development and exposure to nicotine can have long-term health consequences, impacting memory, attention and learning.

E-cigarettes (vapes) are often available in different flavours which can be appealing to young people and may expose them to chemicals and toxins such as formaldehyde, heavy metals, particulate matter and flavouring chemicals, at levels that have the potential to cause adverse health effects. There is not enough research available about the long term side effects of these products and we need your support to ensure our students know they are harmful and should be treated as such.

Cancer Research UK acknowledge that vaping is less harmful than smoking, and is an option to those who wish to stop smoking. However, they also say that vaping is not risk-free and people who have never smoked, should never vape.

Sometimes vapes are disguised as USB's, pens and cosmetics. Research into vaping is still not as established as we would like due to their recent introduction into society. This alone is a concern, as we do not know what harm our students - your children - are possibly doing to their bodies.

Support

There are ways you can help protect your children. These include:

- Talking to your child about why smoking/vaping is harmful for them. It is never too late to have the conversation
- Learning about the different types of e-cigarettes available and the risks associated with using these products
- We recommend our parents/carers have a look at images of vapes online to familiarise what they can look like
- Setting a good example by being tobacco free

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- Reporting those who are selling cigarettes and e-cigarettes to minors. You can do this by contacting Citizens Advice Consumer Service on 03454 040 506

We are working with the Local Authority to establish a uniform response to vaping in schools, along with other external agencies, to support students in understanding the dangers of vaping.

Helpful Resources

You may find the below resources helpful when talking with your child:

- <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/quit-smoking/find-your-local-stop-smoking-service/>
- <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/smoking/how-can-i-quit>
- <https://kick-it.org.uk/>
- <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/smoking-and-cancer/is-vaping-harmful>

Please do contact the school if you have any particular concerns for your child and help will be made available as soon as possible.

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