

# PRINCIPAL'S UPDATE LETTER

December 2022



Dear Parents / Carers,

Since writing to you last, the college has undergone a period of rapid and sustained improvement. Your children have no doubt communicated some of the positive changes around the college. However, following feedback from our first ever Parent Engagement Group, I've been asked to update you on the improvements made in my first 10 weeks as Principal, as well as some of the changes that we hope to see from the Spring Term.

Before discussing the improvements that we have made, and are making, I would like to remind you that on the final day of term, Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December, students will be finishing at 12:15pm. The buses have been rearranged and we will safely escort students off site as usual. If your child is not on school transport, please collect them at the earlier time, or allow them to walk home if appropriate. We look forward to welcoming students back on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> January 2023.

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## Parental Communication

### Parent Engagement Group

The launch of our Parent Engagement Group this half term was a real success. We are excited about the future sessions that Mrs Hunt will lead on with the group. It will be one of the main ways in which we will garner feedback from parents on new initiatives, and aspects of the college. If you do wish to get involved either now or later in the year, please do contact Natalie via email on [nhunt@honitoncollege.devon.sch.uk](mailto:nhunt@honitoncollege.devon.sch.uk)

### Written Communications

Following feedback from parents in the first couple of weeks, I have intentionally limited the amount of communications that I send out to ensure that each communication is purposeful and valued. I will be sending half termly communications that I hope you will find thorough and informative. I appreciate this is a particularly lengthy letter but we are making many improvements and I am keen to keep you all fully informed.

### Parental Engagement

I understand that parent communication and engagement is an area of development for the college. Our Ofsted inspection in late November initiated just over 10% of parents to respond to the parent view survey. If you have any feedback on the communication with the college, could you please email your feedback and ideas to Natalie at the email address above.

## Quality of Education

Quality of Education is the term used to describe the quality of teaching and learning within educational settings. Upon arrival at the college in September, I carried out a full review of what our students learn and how. It was clear there was room and scope for improvement across all areas of learning and we addressed these immediately.

### Assessment

Over the last couple of months, we have made a concerted effort to design an internal college calendar which ties together multiple aspects of parent and student feedback related to reporting student progress. After Christmas, the college will engage in a weeklong period of assessment. Students will complete an assessment for each of their subjects. The rationale for this is multi-faceted, some of which is detailed in the bullets below;

- Assists in reducing student anxiety around terminal assessments and exams at GCSE
- Assists teachers and the college's leaders in adjusting the curriculum
- Provides parents with an understanding of how their child is progressing through each of their subjects
- Allows us to coach the students on assessment techniques
- Assists us with understanding any adjustments and special considerations that need to be made for individual students

### Coaching

As educational leaders and professionals, we all wish to deliver high levels of consistency in teaching and learning across the curriculum. We are eager to see all students at Honiton Community College benefit from the best possible learning environments and teaching. As such, we are engaging in a program of incremental coaching whereby all teachers will be assigned a personal teaching coach, from our team of 6 coaches. Throughout the course of

the year, these coaches will work with our teachers to establish high standards of consistency around;

- Classroom based assessment
- Special Educational Needs' provision in the classroom
- Teaching pedagogy
- Behaviour management

### Knowledge Organisers and Home Learning

In order to improve the consistency of teaching around the college, as well as increase the level of challenge and transparency through our curriculum, we have started work on the creation of knowledge organisers for Key Stage 3 students. These will largely be used to improve the home learning offer, with students asked to engage in a 'spelling test style' system of learning, designed to help them retain the knowledge related aspects of the curriculum. Further details will be released with their launch in January.

### Learning Booklets

Over the first half term of this year, we have worked to collaborate with one of the highest performing, non-selective schools in the area, who already have in place a successful and engaging booklet-led curriculum.

We are in the process of adapting our curriculum offer to streamline the number of learning strategies used across the college and have the whole college learning with a series of common approaches. What we have already seen is that with common routines in different curriculum areas, students are spending more time thinking/learning about the subject content, rather than trying to work out how to complete the tasks.

As the development of our curriculum matures, we will communicate further with parents about these learning strategies, and the content of the curriculum. Quite correctly, the Ofsted Parent View feedback indicated that until this point, parents' understanding of what their children are learning has been limited. We intend to correct this through knowledge organisers, learning booklets and Parent Engagement Group sessions, all of which will provide visual diagrams of what, and when, your child will be learning.

### Reading

We will soon be re-introducing additional opportunities for students to practise and improve their reading skills, to support their progress across all subjects. Building on what we learnt from the 'Drop Everything and Read' programme, we are introducing guided reading into the tutor programme for years 7 to 9 two mornings per week. Students will start their day reading a book together that will extend their vocabulary, increase their confidence and improve their fluency. We will also be allocating an additional hour per fortnight where the whole year group will be reading together with the support of the English team and key role models. For students who struggle we will provide additional support to keep the experience positive (including a targeted phonics programme where required).

The texts have been carefully chosen to broaden their cultural knowledge and compliment their learning in lessons. This quiet, calm start to their day will support their wellbeing and help to show what a positive shared experience reading can be. This will be supported with low-stakes quizzing and rewards to encourage participation and help students recognize the progress they make.

## Safeguarding

### New Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead

From January, the college's safeguarding offer will be bolstered with the arrival of a new DDSL. Clara Rose will be leading on safeguarding across the college and will be the main point of contact for any safeguarding related issues. During the first week in January, Clara will be popping into every classroom in the college to introduce herself and her role. In the interim period, Emily Meek has continued to work as our DDSL, but in January will be starting her new role, delivering Personal Development lessons across the college. If you, or your child, have any safeguarding concerns, please either use the safeguarding form located on the college website, or email a member of the safeguarding team directly.

### Safeguarding Arrangements

Since September, we have worked hard to enhance the safeguarding offer around the college. This includes the following;

- Pink Lanyards - All level 3 safeguarding staff now wear bright pink lanyards to signify their role within the college.
- Wednesday Safeguarding - Every child receives a safeguarding update during tutor time on Wednesday. These cover important topics that are affecting students in the area.
- DSL & DDSL Lesson Drop-ins - Every half term, the DSL and DDSL drop into all classrooms in the college, reiterating reporting mechanisms and important safeguarding messages.
- National Online Safety - All staff have undertaken National Online Safety courses in a wide range of safeguarding topics.
- Safeguarding Bulletins - A weekly safeguarding bulletin is shared with staff, bringing attention to trends, patterns and relevant issues
- Online Reporting Tools - All students have been prompted to report any instances of discrimination (racial, homophobic etc), as well as any form of child-on-child abuse / safeguarding concerns. The forms are located on our website.
- Toilet Door Posters - Posters are updated on the back of toilet doors on a weekly basis. These share important sources of support, on a variety of different safeguarding and wellbeing issues.

If there is anything that we can do to further support our students with safeguarding matters, please contact [emeek@honitoncollege.devon.sch.uk](mailto:emeek@honitoncollege.devon.sch.uk)

## Leadership

### Improved Structure

To maintain the pace of college improvement, we needed to make a number of changes to the college leadership structure. Hayley Blight has been appointed as Personal Development Lead across the college, Dave Dagger has been appointed to the position of Lead Teaching and Learning Coach, both with the objective of driving up standards of teaching across the college.

We are very pleased to have appointed Natalie Hunt to the role of Pastoral Lead. As a Support Lead in the pastoral team, Natalie has already made a really positive impact since September on the way in which we manage behaviour and communicate with our families. She will be

stepping up to lead in the area of College, with a key focus on promoting and improving Positive College Culture and student attendance.

A further new appointment we are pleased to announce is that of Jenny Rance to the role of Early Help & TAF Coordinator. Jenny has been working as our SEND PA for almost a year and has already built up very positive working relationships with staff, students and families.

We are also adding capacity into the Pastoral Team with the addition of extra Heads of Year, meaning that every year group will have a dedicated Head of Year.

Ensuring that newly qualified teachers are supported and cared for is one of the most important aspects of the college, in terms of retaining the most talented teachers for your child/children. In order to ensure that this is the case, Josh Wright will be overseeing the Early Career Teachers and trainee teachers.

Student feedback has indicated that cover lessons present huge challenges to learning for our students. As such, we have started building a cover supervision team in an effort to eliminate the use of supply teachers within the college. This team of three will be led by Chey Taylor.

Finally, Emma Barrett has been appointed to oversee the transition of our students from Primary School to Honiton Community College, working closely with the local Primary School Head Teachers and with students moving here from outside of the local area. A summary of the most recent appointments can be found below;

- **Dave Dagger** – Senior Leader - Coaching
- **Hayley Blight** – Senior Leader - Personal Development
- **Lucy Roberts** – Head of Year 10
- **Bec Dupre** – Head of Year 9
- **Ellie Lindsay** – Head of Year 8
- **Emma Barrett** – Head of Year 7 / Transition Coordinator
- **Josh Wright** – ECT and ITT Coordinator
- **Chey Taylor** – Cover Supervision Coordinator
- **Natalie Hunt** – Pastoral Lead
- **Jenny Rance** – Early Help & TAF Coordinator

We are also looking forward to welcoming back Charlotte Kendall (Science teacher) and Louise Bradbury (PA – SEND) following maternity leaves. Both will return at the start of the new year.

## New Staff

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome other new members of staff.

- Kyle Boswell – Learning Support Assistant
- Laura Brown – Exams Officer (Joining us in January)
- Matt Minshull – Science Teacher (Joining us in January)
- Lisa Cooper – MFL teacher (Joining us in January)
- Clara Rose – Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead (Joining us in January)

## Behaviour, Personal Development and Attendance

The college has enjoyed a number of successes, in terms of the behaviour of students across the college. We have had over 6 schools now visit Honiton Community College to see how and why our students are conducting themselves so well across the college. Many visitors have commented on the politeness and kindness of our students, which has made staff really proud, given it was the aspect of behaviour that was concentrated on during Focus Week.

We would ask that you continue to support us with the use of the college's behaviour policy, as it continues to have such a significant impact upon the amount that all our students are learning in each lesson. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Rob Robson for his services to Honiton Community College. He will be leaving us having worked at the college for over 20 years, in a number of successful roles.

### Focus Week

After the Christmas break, we look forward to welcoming students back to Honiton Community College, which will include the launch of the second Focus Week of the year. We will again seek to reward kind and polite behaviour around the college with the issuance of a 'Culture Coin', which students can redeem for a tongue painter lollypop at Student Reception, during social time. Staff will continue to discuss and celebrate the acts of kindness performed by our students, asking students with blue tongues about their act of kindness / politeness. We will also use Focus Week to check uniform and equipment, helping students who are unable to have a full complement of either.

### Resilience

At the start of the term, students attended a number of assemblies on the changes to expectations and culture around the college. Part of these assemblies involved discussions around resilience, and how the classroom expectations should help students build the resilience required to effectively operate in the world of work, later in life.

Mr Robson and I discussed the need to improve communications with parents about low-level infringements, so that they could build a better picture as to how their child is conducting themselves in lessons. To a large part, this has been met positively by parents and students. Some parents have informed us that it has helped them tackle small underlying issues with in-college behaviour, by talking to their children when they see patterns emerging through C1 points in Class Charts. However, for a small proportion of parents and students, the negative connotations of the term 'C1' are still problematic, but as one of our students explains,

"The meaning of C1 has changed slightly this year which has caused some confusion. C1 are more of a warning then a punishment." Emily Leigh-Mallory

To help this shift in understanding, from January, the term 'C1' will be replaced by the term 'Expectation'. Two expectations within a lesson will continue to result in a Reflection Room referral. However, for children who only receive one 'Expectation' note in a lesson, the 'Expectation' will simply serve as a communication tool for parents, allowing positive conversations at home.

Making small mistakes is part of growing up, as well as operating within the modern world as an adult. The 'Expectation' notes are designed to help students learn from mistakes and build resilience and the learning habits/behaviours that will make them successful, not only at Honiton Community College, but also in the world of work.

## Wellbeing Team

We have recently restructured our wellbeing team to encourage a whole school approach to promoting good mental health. Sian Peace will now be working in the Reflection Room with the opportunity to triage students referred there and identify any wider concerns. Working with Sasha Thomas and Natalie Hunt, they will encourage the high standards of behaviour now evident whilst ensuring wellbeing needs are met.

Kate Quick has moved into the Learning Support Team in a role which will allow her to share best practice with the team of Learning Support Assistants who work across the College in many of our lessons.

Mark Lemmer, as Mental Health Coach, will work with the new CAMHS Education Mental Health Practitioner (EMHP) to ensure whole school approaches to supporting students' mental health are robust and consistent. We are incredibly fortunate to have secured this additional expertise one day a week, as availability is limited. The Education Mental Health Practitioner will work one to one with some students as well as carrying out group work and upskilling staff to ensure all adults at HCC can identify signs in students that could give cause for concern and provide appropriate encouragement and support.

## Attendance

The college is supported by a dedicated Education Welfare Service. This comes in the form of Ginnette Williams who is helping and supporting our families with attendance. Ginnette is working to ensure that students attend college as much as possible, to maximise the students' life chances. We know the profound impact that absence can have upon the personal development of young people, as well as their academic progress. Given the impact of student absence through the pandemic, we would urge parents to send their children into college as much as is possible. If in doubt, please send your child into college and we can support them throughout the day, sending them home if they are too unwell to remain in lessons.

## Multi-Academy Trust Exploration and Collaboration

Several factors have led the college and its governors to review our position as a Single Academy Trust. At present, the college's leadership and governance have started reviewing the Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) in the local area. In doing so, we are seeking to identify a MAT whose values align with that of Honiton Community College, as well as who would be able to support our college improvement journey. This process, as well as any final integration with a MAT is unlikely to impact upon students or parents in any significant way. Instead, it would be a process which would consolidate our financial security, as well as offer the college additional quality assurance checks and support mechanisms for growth.

## Ofsted

As you will know, we recently welcomed Ofsted into the college, a process which we felt was universally positive. Throughout the inspection, we felt that the inspection team were rigorous and fair. Over the summer and at the beginning of term, I carried out a full evaluation of the college's strengths, areas for development and recent academic progress and attainment. We



felt as though the inspection team's findings mirrored our internal Self Evaluation Form, as well as the College's School Improvement Plan.

We are very confident that the college has made significant progress since September and has a coherent plan to deliver excellent standards of provision and improve results. As already mentioned, our new booklet driven curriculum is very much in its infancy but promises to be exciting and engaging for our students. Many of our most recent changes to the curriculum require time to bed in and galvanise, as does our new assessment structure.

We still await the final report from Ofsted and hope to be able to share this in the New Year.

## Post 16

The Post 16 Centre has enjoyed a very successful start to the year. We have seen students thrive in the nurturing and academically challenging environment in the centre itself, as well as across the college, in lessons. It has also been a busy term with our Year 13's making their university applications with many of them already having received offers back.

We have seen a significant uplift in the number of applications from our current year 11 students against last year's. For any students that are considering staying with us beyond year 11, and into Post 16, we would encourage parents and students to engage with Emily Meek and Selena Burroughs over anything that would aid the transition.

We have a limited number of laptops which can be applied for, as well as paid employment opportunities on site, amongst a range of other resources and opportunities. Staying at HCC provides our students with a safe, familiar and supportive environment to excel in not only their education but also their personal development, through many social opportunities, fundraising events and organised events such as the recent Christmas Movie Night Sleepover in the Post 16 Centre .

Recently, our Year 11 students, in preparation for next year, had the opportunity to experience either the Post 16 Centre, or Exeter College for a day; we were very pleased to gather feedback and discuss the students' experiences with them. This taster experience will be extended to the students after Christmas with the mock examinations in early January. After they are completed, students will be asked to collect their results, in a similar fashion to the actual GCSE results in the summer. Dependent upon their performance in the mocks, a number of students will find a 'Golden Ticket' located in their brown result's envelope which will provide those students with an 'unconditional offer' of a Post 16 place. If you have any queries related to the mocks, or year 11 in general, please contact [Emily Meek](#).

## Transition

With the appointment of Emma Barrett as the Transition Coordinator for the college, she will be working more closely with Ann Denner, the chair of Honiton Learning Community, to improve our transition offer alongside the local Primary School Head Teachers. Already this has resulted in a plan to offer a full week's transition in the summer term for year 6 students.

We are also seeing collaboration with aspects of the curriculum, with an attempt to ensure that the head-start that our year 6-7 students have made in their primary school is capitalized upon.

A number of weeks ago, Miss Barrett led the year 7 pizza and chips' feedback session. This saw the Primary School Head Teachers come to Honiton Community College and discuss the

school with their former students. I think that Mrs Hammett (Executive Head Teacher of Fort Federation) summed up the feedback well in saying that;

*“The overwhelming feelings of our children is that they are clearly very happy in school and they feel proud to be at HCC.”*

We plan to repeat this exercise next year. If you have any feedback about your child’s transition experience, positive or constructive, I would urge you to email Miss Barrett so that future cohorts of students benefit from a transition experience that is the best that it can be. [ebarrett@honitoncollege.devon.sch.uk](mailto:ebarrett@honitoncollege.devon.sch.uk)

## Best Wishes

I would lastly like to thank all of you for such a warm welcome to Honiton Community College and the local community. I look forward to serving both after the Christmas break, and to see our young people and families continue to thrive. I wish you and your family a happy and prosperous festive period and new year.

Sincerely,

Alex Kirkbride