



8 SEPTEMBER 2022

The Start of Term

We are full. *Very* full. With over 1,700 students, we are the fullest we have ever been, in every year group, and I'm delighted to say that everyone so far has been lovely. The external provider for Year 12 study skills on Monday said it was the best group he had ever had at Cheney and notably one of the most positive groups he has dealt with in any school. Our new Year 7 cohort have been really nice, and the atmosphere in lessons throughout the school has been excellent. Clearly, with 2,000 adults and young people in one space, one or two children have forgotten themselves and have needed a gentle reset, but even those students have been lovely; perhaps they were just very excited to be back in school after too long away. The contrast with the start of the school year in 2020 is stark; we are in a good place, and improving. There is gloom a bit lower down, so let's remember that in all the essentials, we are in a very good place.

Summer Works

There has been a huge amount of work done over the summer. Chadwick has been reclad, the roof on Wainwright is being replaced (this will run until December), lots of the school has been repainted, three new classrooms have been added, more space has been created in the library, and a number of other internal improvements have happened, including very new DT machines and a very old printing press. This is an amazingly positive start to the school year, and our site team have worked unbelievably hard throughout the summer to make sure everything remained on track and the school was (almost entirely) ready for the students to come back.

The SPA and behaviour

Part of the summer work programme has been the creation of the SPA (Single Point of Access), which is staffed all the time and is the place for students to go to get stuff sorted out. This could be an argument in the playground, writing a statement about something that has happened, needing a plaster, needing support with something, feeling sick or just needing a space to calm down.

As part of this, ASC (Attainment Support Centre) is no longer a place to go randomly. This is now a planned and taught provision, aiming to allow students to reintegrate successfully after a major incident, and is going to be used instead of suspensions. Students will be placed here for between one and three days, usually starting with a parental meeting. We want to radically reduce the number of days lost to suspension, and to use any major behavioural problem as an opportunity to reflect, change and improve. This also means that a suspension is a very big deal indeed; we will use this if necessary, but it is a sign of very serious displeasure.

The point is that the causes of poor behaviour are addressed, so that they don't happen so much in the future. Because there will be less punishment, there will also be less conflict, which has the effect of allowing many more teachers to notice and address things which don't meet our expectations. More poor behaviour will be addressed more frequently; it's just that the consequence is more likely to be a conversation than a formal sanction. This is a work in progress, and it will take a few years to reach the point where formal punishment is as rare as I would like, and no doubt there will be bumps in the road.

Money, Gas and the Winter of Discontent

You will have seen a lot in the media about the upcoming funding crisis in schools. In brief, this is because of an unfunded pay rise (wage increases promised by the government, but which have to be found out of existing budgets), the huge rise in energy prices, and other inflationary pressures. For Cheney, this equates to a rise in costs of over half a million pounds in the next year, with £355,000 anticipated increase in gas costs alone.

This is clearly a problem, and is not sustainable, but the worst scenarios outlined in the press do not apply to Cheney; there is no chance of a 3 day week, or sandwiches rather than hot food, or turning off the bunsen burners in science or the ovens in food tech. In fact, the daily running of the school will be entirely unaffected, and students won't notice a difference in provision, even if I will be walking around turning lights off in a slightly obsessive manner (which is anyway good for the environment).

The reason for this is that we have paused all major purchases and capital investment, we have a hiring freeze (except for like-for-like replacements necessary to deliver the curriculum), we have halted our plans for a rolling programme of equipment replacement, and our refurbished blocks will help with the energy costs. On top of this, we will need to spend our reserves. In this manner, we can survive two years of gentle decline before we run out of money completely.

It is sad to say that we are in a much better position than 90% of schools in the country, some of which will be in real distress by Christmas. I am optimistic that the government

(now that we have one) will help; the track record over the last few years is actually quite good, and we have had extra grants when government policy changes have increased our costs unexpectedly (such as with the increase in National Insurance or pension contributions). I do not anticipate getting the whole amount, but I think money to cover the increase in energy costs is likely.

Unfortunately, I think there is a high chance of strikes or other industrial action in the second half of term. When ballots are held, I will keep you updated, but the basic issue is a 20% decline in real wages over the last 15 years or so. The last thing I or any of my colleagues at Cheney want is more disruption to children's education, and going on strike is very much a last resort. I fear it may come to that, though; if it does, I am determined that it will not poison the very positive atmosphere in school, and we are not going to have an 'us and them', 'management versus workers' culture, which would kill all the progress we have made over the last five years stone dead.

Attendance

This is obvious: turn up (and go to your lessons), and you will succeed. This is not a new or radical insight. As every year, the relationship between good attendance and good results is very tight; I would even venture to say causative. Yet again, both the GCSE and A Level results demonstrate this.

The message is very simple: come to school.

Attendance is going to be a very big focus this year, both for us and nationally. I'm afraid this means that I will not authorise holidays in term time; for emergencies, that is of course different, but the basic answer to requests for time off in term time is no. We also need to get back to old habits; if your child is genuinely too ill to come to school, they should stay home and recover, but if they can come to school, they should.

We are tightening up some of our procedures, including sending the unexplained absence texts earlier and more reliably. This increases the risk of sending these texts in error; I apologise very sincerely in advance if this happens to you, and it causes anxiety about where your children are. I would rather that a parent rang in, we checked, and discovered we had made a mistake, than a child had gone missing and we failed to inform the police within the crucial first few hours. It is surprisingly complicated to get 1,700 register marks 100% accurate every day, and I'm afraid that mistakes are inevitable.

Bullying

As with the use of changing rooms (hence the possibility of wearing the sports uniform all day), we have listened to our students on the subject of bullying. Although the atmosphere of the school is very positive, and improving, around a quarter of our students tell us that either they or one of their friends has experienced bullying at school. This is far too high; even one student feeling uncomfortable in school is too high. What observation, data and student feedback is telling us is that this is rarely physical bullying. Much more commonly, it is unkind words, ongoing whispers or friendship groups falling out, all amplified by social media. We need to bring this into the light and address it openly, so that we can reduce the frequency.

We also need to be clearer about what happens when a case of bullying is reported, as too many of our students were saying that 'nothing happens'. In fact a lot happens, and hours of work go on, mainly involving the year teams and the Behaviour Improvement Team. This happens behind closed doors, however, and we need to be clearer about what will happen when a case of bullying is reported. This doesn't mean that we will share all the details, either of what lies behind it, or of any potential punishment, but we will make it clearer to both victims and parents what has been done, and we will check in with the victim much more explicitly to see that the issue has been resolved.

The aim is to stop the bullying happening, to help the bully understand the effect of their behaviour and to make them a better person. Sanctions may form part of this, but revenge or punishment is not the aim; preventing future problems and educating young people is. This does not mean we are going soft; ongoing bullying will not be tolerated, and repeat offenders will eventually face suspension and expulsion, if they refuse all attempts at reform and education.

I hope that the other effect will be to encourage more students to report unkindness. This is not snitching, or snaking; it is allowing an adult to help resolve a situation, hopefully before it gets poisonous, and before serious punishment is needed.

Uniform Reminder

It has been lovely to welcome our students back to school looking so smart. The uniform has not changed, but we are allowing students to wear either sports or academic uniform; what we are doing is insisting on the correct uniform. You can see the [full guidelines here](#).

As with any adjustment to habits, we are ironing out a few teething issues and I would like to reinforce that there are no punishments for students in the wrong uniform, while we work through this.

Below you will find answers to some of the most common questions we have had in the hope to provide more clarity:

I am unclear on the PE footwear requirements: what is allowed?

- Students need to wear black footwear at school, regardless of whether they are wearing PE uniform or academic uniform. Students can change into any appropriate shoes for their PE lessons. Some students wear black trainers all of the time. Some students wear black shoes and change into white trainers for their lessons. Both of these are fine. The key thing is that when walking around school, not in a PE lesson, that footwear (trainers or shoes) are black.

I am worried about the increased cost of uniform in the current economic climate: what support is available?

- We appreciate this is a very real concern for many of our students and their families. If you are struggling to source appropriate uniform, please do get in touch with your child's year team. We have spare uniform, our PTA has spare uniform, and we can support some families by purchasing items where needed. Please talk to us and we will do everything we can to help.

Are white shirts allowed as part of the academic uniform?

- Yes: white polo shirts, or a formal white shirt are fine. White t-shirts are not.

What are the rules on black jumpers?

- Students can wear black jumpers in their PE lessons. Around school black jumpers should not be seen, just the grey one. If a student is cold, they should be wearing their blazer. Around school students can wear coats. If they are extremely cold, they can wear the PE branded jumper, the grey school jumper, or a black long sleeved top underneath their red top.

Are blazers compulsory at all times?

- Yes. All students should wear their blazers at all times unless given permission in the classroom to take it off.

Do the PE trousers/leggings/shorts need to be completely black?

- Yes. No white stripes, or logos.

Tempest Photography

Tempest Photography will be coming into school to photograph students in years 7, 10 and 12 for our records.

In order to allow parents to order a copy of their child's photograph, we share the parent's email address with Tempest. If you would prefer us to not share your email address you may opt out.

If you choose to opt out, you will not receive an email from Tempest, nor will you be able to order a copy of the school photo.

The form closes on Sunday 11th September at 11:59PM.

[Please fill out a form for each student you need to opt out.](#)

Privacy Notices

We'd like to make you aware of the Privacy Notices for Students and Parents, available on our website.

[Pupils Privacy Notice](#)

[Parents Privacy Notice](#)

Mental Health

Just another reminder that Oxfordshire Youth is delivering an online **Mental Health Awareness Session** specifically for **Parents and Carers** of children and young people. **The sessions are FREE for Oxfordshire residents.**

Our Mental Health Awareness Training for parents and carers aims to aid understanding of relevant topics surrounding young people's mental health today. The training also explores how parents/carers can talk to their young people about the struggles around ill mental health and where they can seek support.

Please use the links below to sign up for the course.

13th September:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/an-online-mental-health-awareness-session-for-parents-and-carers-tickets-296905380987>

27th September:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/an-online-mental-health-awareness-session-for-parents-and-carers-tickets-296936744797>

In order for parents and carers to receive their ticket for free, please inform them to use the first part of their postcode as the promo code in capital letters (e.g: OX4).

Rumble Museum Newsletter - 7 September 2022

In our first Rumble newsletter of the term, you can catch up with our very busy summer of installations and events. Find out about our new display cases in the Lane Building, our brand new Rumble tube map, the arrival of a beautiful Victorian Printing Press and our sea-themed classics summer school! Click on the link above to find out more.

