

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are writing to you on behalf of Surrey Secondary Phase Council who support and advocate for Surrey Secondary Headteachers, with whom we work in partnership to promote educational excellence and to address key priorities in education. At our recent conference, as well as in local quadrant meetings, we discussed a number of significant concerns affecting all our school communities and agreed to collaborate to inform you as parents and carers. These challenges are common to all schools and should not be regarded as particular to any one school.

Recruitment and Retention

The education sector in the UK is experiencing a shortage of skilled teachers, school leaders and support staff. This shortage has been further exacerbated by the increasing demands and complexities of the teaching profession, making it more challenging to attract and retain professionals. Recent statistics underscore the severity of the challenges we are navigating. Record numbers of teachers are leaving the profession, including during the first 5 years of qualifying and with vast numbers leaving before retirement. This alarming trend is compounded by the latest initial teacher training (ITT) census statistics revealing that only 59% of the secondary teacher target was met in 2022-23. In total, 13 of the 17 secondary subjects failed to meet recruitment targets, with physics, design and technology and modern foreign languages being the subjects with the lowest uptake. Given the extent of this crisis, schools are focusing efforts on retention as well as recruitment, meaning it is more important than ever to ensure that we hold on to our excellent staff and promote a good working environment for them.

Attendance Matters

Regular attendance is essential for young people to get the most out of their school experience, including their attainment, wellbeing and wider life chances. DfE data shows that students with the highest attainment at the end of key stage 2 and key stage 4 have higher rates of attendance over the key stage compared to those with the lowest attainment. Surrey data shows that attendance needs to be higher across the whole county in all phases, and all schools work with families to understand barriers and agree how they can work together to resolve them; however, schools must always set out and communicate high expectations.

Raising Concerns

Surrey schools are committed to delivering the best possible education for all our young people and building positive relationships with families towards this common goal. We welcome all feedback, especially the positive, however we appreciate that there may be times when it is necessary for parents and carers to raise concerns. In secondary schools it is always important to raise these concerns informally with the relevant member of staff in the first instance as the majority can be dealt with quickly to find a resolution. Following this, if the concern necessitates escalation or a complaint, you can find your school's/Trust's complaints policy on the school/Trust website, and this must be followed before any further escalation. Complaints made to any outside agency will not be followed up if the school's/Trust's complaints procedure has not been followed to its conclusion.

Working together

Secondary Phase Council is working together with colleagues from Early Years, Primary and Special phases to ensure that we engage pro-actively with the Local Authority to develop a shared ambition for all Surrey children. Schools are striving to provide the best care and support for their students, but the challenges of supporting the growing pastoral care needs of students and the lack of funding

within the wider community are pressing. In the face of limited resources, schools are finding creative ways to address these challenges, forming partnerships with local organisations, charities and churches to supplement resources, and leveraging technology, but the increasing demands on schools and the needs of the young people we serve are not going away and we appreciate your understanding and patience as we navigate these difficulties. As Surrey school leaders our commitment to your child's education remains unwavering. We are proud of the passion and dedication we see from our school leaders, and this is borne out by the excellent outcomes we see in Surrey schools. We are appealing to parents to reflect on the issues we have raised and for this to inform any contact you may make with schools, especially where you may have concerns arising.

Thank you for your continued support and we are confident that working together all children and young people will have the opportunity to thrive and flourish in Surrey.

Daniel Aldridge, Co-Chair, Surrey Secondary Phase Council

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