



Wednesday 11 October 2023

Dear Parents and Carers

I had planned to write my first letter to you this half term, next week, with news of student achievements and the range of activities with which they have engaged. I also planned to write about the helpful opportunities this half, for tutors and subject teachers to meet face to face with our families in years 7, 10, 11 and 12, to provide information on the year ahead with respect to the curriculum, assessment and personal development and how these information evenings had been received so positively by all.

However I find myself writing to you now, this week, following the atrocious events of the weekend and still unfolding. Like many schools we have a number of students and staff who have been directly impacted. On Monday morning at the weekly staff briefing, I shared the directives to schools that I received at the weekend, from the Department for Education and from the local authority, with guidance and a reminder that schools have a duty to remain politically impartial. That said, I expressly asked staff to be vigilant and to visibly demonstrate our humanitarian empathy for all those involved directly, indirectly or concerned on any human level at all.

We have been quietly working to ensure our students and staff are not impacted during their school day and to ensure that everyone feels safe and not threatened in any way while they are in our care or at work. Regrettably we have become aware that a very small number of our students have made comments which are antisemitic or targeted at specific groups and understandably these have made the wider student and staff body feel uncomfortable and made some students feel threatened and unsafe. This morning we shared a message with the whole school to promote community cohesion in school and to express our zero tolerance of comments and behaviours that might lead any of our community to feel uncomfortable or threatened. Today we wanted to act as quickly as possible once we became aware of the issue in school. The message will continue to be reinforced in form times and in assemblies.

Furthermore the local authority has notified me today that some extremely distressing videos might be released on Tik Tok. I would advise removing this app from your daughters' phones and talking to them to make sure they do not watch them. The task of shielding our children from what is happening is difficult and delicate; we need them to be educated and aware but not traumatised and frightened.

Safer schools metropolitan police have also issued guidance to schools as follows:

Schools should ensure that political expression by pupils is done sensitively, avoiding disruption and feelings of intimidation or targeting for other pupils and staff. Schools should also make every effort to ensure that this activity does not extend to discriminatory bullying or involve the expression of antisemitic, anti-Muslim, or other discriminatory views. Where this does happen, the Department for Education expects schools to deal with these incidents with all due seriousness, in line with their behaviour policy.

Depending on the circumstances, safeguarding leads may also look to determine whether abusive and discriminatory views expressed or shared by pupils are representative of a wider susceptibility, and consider the appropriateness of engaging with support through the Prevent programme.

I am working with the senior team and our wider safeguarding and pastoral teams, to support students who are feeling vulnerable and to have conversations with students who have not been mindful when expressing views.

The school will follow its behaviour policy to respond to any student who intentionally makes comments or behaves in ways which are divisive or hurtful. I know that our families will support the school at this time to ensure everyone in our learning community feels comfortable and safe.

Please contact me should you have any questions, concerns or wish to discuss any of this further.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Violet Walker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V'.

Violet Walker
Headteacher