

The
Portsmouth Academy

15 December 2021

Dear Parents and Carers of TPA,

As we enter a new year, with the hope and optimism that it always brings, I am writing to you, in my capacity as Director of Education for Thinking Schools Academy Trust's schools in Portsmouth, to ask for your understanding and support. Many of you will know me as the former Principal of the school; for those of you I have not yet had the chance to connect with, I say hello.

It is fair to say that over the past few years The Portsmouth Academy has been on quite a journey. The school has grown significantly – trebling in size – and we have been through a pandemic that has altered the very core of what a school is, and what it stands for.

When our students returned from lockdown learning, many of them were understandably disillusioned. Despite providing live teaching and continuing to meet the needs of our most vulnerable young people, our students have experienced a shock to their schooling that none of us could have ever imagined in terms of its effects on their social and emotional wellbeing.

I accept that some of our students have struggled to adhere to the code of conduct we expect. At times, you may have heard things as parents, which may not have always been the full facts but which have understandably caused you alarm. And I know that you have sometimes felt frustrated by the school's lack of communication and support. Where we have let you down, I can only apologise.

But I would also like to ask for your understanding and support to move forward. I know the quality of staff that exist within TPA. I know how much they care and the lengths they go to, to deliver the high-class education that meets the needs of our students, that inspires them to 'Aspire and Achieve' and that tackles them when they show behaviours that undermine our ethos. I also know how well the school has done to stay open this Autumn term amidst the challenges of staff absence linked to the pandemic.

I have every confidence in the foundations of the academy and our ability to proactively build the educational experience we want every student to have – one free from disruption, from disrespect, and from degradation of personal characteristics. As my five-year-old son put it to me recently: 'We are all different and yet we are the same.'

Portsmouth is built on families and community. As a school in the heart of the Fratton community, we exist to serve you and we do our best every day. But we cannot do it alone. Great schools are always the result of a strong team, with staff, students and parents all playing their part.

So to make sure that TPA is the brilliant co-educational community that we can all be proud of, I am asking three things of you. Firstly, to make sure that your child every day has the uniform and equipment that they need to succeed. Every student needs a pencil case with pen, pencil, ruler, rubber, sharpener, scientific calculator and protractor. This may seem small, but collectively it builds a culture of aspiration to learn. Please use the Christmas period to make sure that they have this and that they bring it to school. Furthermore, we don't know what additional Covid measures will be asked of us by the government in the new year – and we ought to ensure that our students are not sharing equipment.

www.theportsmouthacademy.org.uk

TRANSFORMING LIFE CHANCES

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Director of Education: Miss N Sheppard BSc (Hons) MA NPQH

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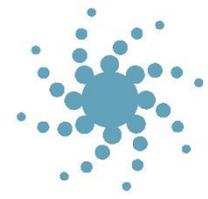
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Secondly, if problems arise, please give us the benefit of the doubt and believe us when we say that we care and that we will take action, and support us in the actions we identify as being critical to addressing situations. In the previous eight years that I have worked with the school, I have enjoyed working in partnership with parents to bring about the changes needed. I know there is a huge amount of good work that goes on in this way, and yet occasionally staff have to experience anger and hostility which is detrimental to their own wellbeing and to our ability to retain them to work in the school.

Thirdly, we would be very grateful if you could reinforce with your child that they are privileged to attend a school which has so much going for it – great facilities, Advanced Thinking School, Microsoft Showcase School, a great range of clubs, brilliant departments (Music, Art, PE to name but a few) and excellent staff who care. We need our students to walk into the building each day and value what we are continually creating for them. We can only do that with your support. You can support us by making sure you download the ClassCharts App so that you can keep track of your child's conduct whilst they are on the school site.

I am completely dismayed at the level of vandalism the school has experienced since we returned from the lockdown. It makes the school feel unpleasant for all of the students and whilst some students see it as a joke, it is a far cry from being that in reality.

Thank you for your time in reading this letter. I hope the spirit of it is clear - it is only through coming together as a community that we can hope to address the impact of the pandemic and to give our young people the education that they truly deserve. We do not know what we will face in the new year in terms of the pandemic and we must support one another through this incredibly difficult time.

From January, 2022 I will be spending 4 days per week in the school, addressing the concerns I have about students' conduct and promoting the culture of Aspire and Achieve, a culture that I know was fundamental in you choosing us to provide a secondary education for your child. We have decided to add a third value to our school motto – and that will be Respect.

May I wish you all a lovely Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Yours faithfully,

Natalie Sheppard
Director of Education – TSAT Portsmouth

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