

25 November 2010

Dear Parents/Carers

Proposal to improve the learning opportunities for Academy students

The time since our Academy opened in September has passed very quickly. We have had some ups and downs but it is clear that we are making real progress in creating something special which will raise the aspirations and achievements for all our young people. It is not every town where students write to the local paper to say how much they think their school is getting better – as some of our students did earlier this term.

Now it's time to think about how we will move things on to a new level in 2011. The students have some very clear ideas. When the Student Senate met this month they said that one of the most positive things about the Academy was being able to work with students from the other campus. The staff and I also think that this would be a better way to make sure we can meet students' needs and provide them with more opportunities.

So we've been talking to Governors about making some major changes to how the Academy is organised. But before we decide whether or not to go ahead with them, we'd like to hear what you have to say.

The plan would be to develop the North Campus at Croxtan Road as a "Learning Village" for Years 7 – 9 where students will be amongst students of a similar age and stage in learning. This will enable students who, on entry, need to build up their basic skills in order to effectively prepare for the demands of a more challenging curriculum later on, to do so through broad topic based work. It also means students who are ready, through years 7 – 9, can experience a much richer, diverse and more challenging curriculum by making the best of the wonderful new opportunities created in this way.

At the same time we would establish a 14 -19 Learning Village at the South Campus in Staniforth Road for our older students. Here the specialist facilities and more space will allow more focused teaching and specialised learning. This will improve performance at GCSE and will enable students to become high performing and aspirational. It will make it easier for them to move into post 16 study that we know will maximise their potential.

If we go ahead with these plans, there will obviously be some challenges for us initially. We intend to work these through during the planning phase but do not believe that they are unsolvable. The first priority will be to ensure that students travel safely especially if there is a large distance between their Learning Village and home. We intend surveying all postal codes of our students to assess the implications and the level of need for the provision of a bus service across Thetford. The aim would be for the Learning Villages to be established after the Summer Half Term Holiday on 6th June 2011.

These plans are strongly supported by our education sponsors and by the heads of local primary schools. I hope that you will also agree that they represent the best way for us to enhance and improve the standards and expectations of our young people.

Please take some time to look at the document attached and if you would like to respond please complete the reply slip and return it to us on North Campus at Croxtan Road. There will be a meeting for parents/carers to hear more about these plans, ask questions and express your views at the South Campus on Staniforth Road on Wednesday 1st December at 5.00pm. I look forward to meeting you then.

Yours sincerely


Christine Carey
Principal

Proposed strategy for improving learning opportunities for students

North Campus : 11 – 14 Learning Village

Alternative Pathways Learning Place

Advantages:

Embed core values and good learning routines tailored to age and stage

Cost effective focussed relevant and meaningful resourcing and facilities management for each key stage

Early diagnostic assessment on entry to form the framework appropriate for needs analysis for individual learning plans and in 'nurture' environment

Fundamental learning and thinking skills are embedded

Focus on literacy and numeracy; project and enquiry based methodology to establish independent and responsible learning skills

Delivery across whole student cohort provides consistency

Primary Headteachers have indicated support

Disadvantages:

Transport for students living further distances away – impact on attendance/ travel provision

Without careful timetabling staff may feel restricted in teaching and this could impact on professional development

Some potential set up cost implications

South Campus : 14 – 19 Learning Village
Post 16 Learning Place
Gifted and Talented Place

Advantages:

Attracts subject specialist teaching

Encourages aspiration and ambition in a mature learner environment

Offers specialist teaching resources and facilities especially for vocational contexts and for meeting curriculum needs of all students at all ability levels

Builds on basic skills established in 11-14 phase

A step into a focussed attainment environment

Atmosphere of independent learning where students and tutors work closely towards meeting their aspirational targets to gateway their learning

Disadvantages:

Transport for students living further distances away – impact on attendance/ travel provision

Without careful timetabling staff may feel restricted in teaching and this could impact on professional development.

Some potential set up cost implications

Timescale:

Permission gained from Governors for consultation in support of proposal – **16th November 2010**

Consultation with parents, staff and students w/c	-	22nd November 2010
Strategy put to Full Governors	-	7th December 2010
Curriculum Review and Proposals for improved model	-	mid December
Survey of student views completed by	-	10th December
Options and implications developed	-	January
Timetable construction	-	February onwards
Implementation	-	6 June 2011