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Dear Parents



I was delighted to join our Year 8 learners last week as they graduated from Year 8, ready to begin their GCSE studies in Year 9. The school is keen to celebrate its successes and sharing this big moment in their education was a real pleasure. Many of the learners I spoke to are really looking forward to taking GCSE's for the first time while others were naturally more cautious. This is where Castlebrook's curriculum really benefits our learners. The vast majority will be studying subjects they have chosen, not subjects imposed upon them. It also eases them into the GCSE system by taking a couple of courses quite early in their school life (which also means they can re-sit if necessary before leaving school) and

reduces the pressure in the final two years. It spreads the burden and allows them to concentrate on a smaller number of subjects at a time.

When choosing GCSE options for next year, the construction courses have again proved popular but also a wide variety of others, for example photography and languages. These individual learning pathways set Castlebrook apart from other Schools in



Bury and you only have to look at the progress with exam results to see that the changes introduced three years ago are starting to have a huge and positive impact. Of course Ofsted also singled out the curriculum for special praise when they visited the school last year.

All in all, the graduation last week was a great opportunity to look back on the progress made by the learners so far and look forward to the challenges ahead.

One of the other benefits of our new curriculum was less obvious at the time but is no less important. Attendance and behaviour at the School have both seen a marked improvement. Our learners are studying subjects they have shown an interest in and they are therefore generally more engaged in their studies. Miss Troy, Assistant Head, has also put in an enormous amount of work with some learners and their families to improve attendance. A combination of these factors has seen attendance levels become much better. Whole school attendance over the last 3 years has been 91.2% (2008-9), 91.6% (2009-10) and 93.4% (2010-11). Persistent absences (where the same learners do not come to school repeatedly) over the last four years has been 12% (2007-8), 7% (2008-9), 5.8% (2009-10) and 4.8% (2010-11). There is a clear trend of attendance improving and persistent absences reducing.

With the summer holiday season approaching, please be reminded that the school will not authorise time off for family holidays. It is a tough policy but one that Governors strongly support. We are keen to see our attendance figures improve even further and there is no reason this cannot be achieved. Our research confirms that on average, learners drop a GCSE grade for every 17 days missed from school during term time!

In terms of pupil behaviour, it is occasionally necessary to exclude learners from school if they fail to abide by the rules. These exclusions can range from a ½ day up to 5 days but are sometimes permanent for the most serious cases. The number of days lost to exclusions during the last school year has seen a fall of 56% compared to three years ago. The number of incidents requiring an exclusion has also fallen by around 37% over the same period and those learners with two or more exclusions fell 32%.

The School's Behaviour Policy places as much importance (if not more) on rewarding good behaviour as it does on the sanctions for poor behaviour. All schools have to contend with unauthorised absences and learners whose behaviour is not of the standard expected. However, it is very pleasing to see the progress being made at Castlebrook which we hope will continue. Governors are presented with updates at each termly meeting to help us track trends and monitor progress.

The Governing Body has two vacancies for Parent Governors. If you are interested in becoming involved, please do not hesitate to make contact with either Mr Roberts or me via the school. Either of us would be happy to chat through what is involved.

Finally, and on behalf of Governors, I just wanted to place on record our thanks to those learners leaving the School this year. I know how hard you have all worked for your GCSEs and I am sure you will be rewarded when the results are announced in August. I hope you have enjoyed your time at Castlebrook and we wish you all the best of luck with your future studies and careers. Enjoy the Prom next week – you have earned it!

R Dawson

Chair of Governors