

Response to Student Voice Questions

Firstly thank you for all the questions. I always try to have a rationale to rules and my decisions. You may not agree with them but at least you will understand my thinking.

Here are my responses to your questions. I hope you find them honest, open and informative.

1. Uniform and dress around the school

Q: Why is uniform so important?

The aim of the uniform at AHS is to

- heighten school pride
- increase the sense of oneness, a sense of identity
- help students resist peer pressure to buy expensive and fashionable clothing
- diminish economic and social barriers between students

We do not have an expensive uniform and try to keep costs low.

I am aware that there is an issue with the lack of stretch in the current skirt material and design that some students find restrictive. We will review this during this academic year.

I want to increase the environmental credentials of AHS's uniform by exploring the possibility of:

- Clothing made from recycled materials
- Second hand uniform shop (to reduce waste and cost)

Q: Why can't coats be worn in lessons/break/lunchtimes?

Coats should not be worn in lessons because it detracts from the above rationale. It also masks an underlying issue with either the room not being at a comfortable temperature or jumpers not being worn.

I will raise this issue with the site manager about whether there should be more heat in the rooms.

Q: Why does jewellery affect our learning so much?

A second question related to: Why can't we wear shaped studs?

I am not sure jewellery does affect learning but I think this question alludes to why do teachers see it as so important?

In the case of PE and physical activities there are certain rules there for your Health and Safety. Hanging earrings are an example of this.

There are two issues here:

- I am less concerned about the shape than I am the size. For example I do not want to see rounded studs (pearls for example) or large studs. Likewise they should be plain silver or gold, rather than gems.

However we have less of a problem with small stars etc.

The problem with uniforms that become 'shades of grey', rather than clear cut is where is the line? At the moment the line is very clear but when does a shape become large enough to be an issue for PE and who decides?

- Having a 'simple stud rule' supports the same rationale as uniform generally to diminish economic and social barriers and we do want to undermine this.

Q: Why does having our skirts rolled affect our learning? There are no boys here to distract us.

I don't think it does distract you from learning, but if we wanted our uniform to be shorter skirts we would have them made that way.

School uniforms allow students to not have to conform to societal pressures so we strike a balance between 'wear what you like' and a very strict uniform. Wherever we put the boundary some will find it too lenient and some too strict: that is the current situation. However I think we have it about right and ask you to meet the school's expectations.

2. Teaching and Learning

Q: Is it possible that courses can provide a long-term plan to Year 12 and 13 students to allow us to track our progress on topics and coursework and allow us to read around the subject? Is it possible these plans could be in one consistent format across the school?

If you look at the Curriculum area of the website you will see that there is a new Curriculum Map section which has been completely redesigned. There is now a detailed curriculum map for every subject at Key Stage 3. This is down to the good work of Subject Team Leaders and Mrs Wilkes.

For Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5, more information is available in the subject pages of the relevant Google Sites and these are linked to this page of the website.

Q: Can the behaviour policy be clarified so that it is clearer what different marks are for and what the consequences are?

This has been done this year. If you look at the policy on the website there is now a matrix (not The Matrix) that shows more clearly actions and consequences. This is under 'About us', Key Information and policies, Behaviour and exclusions policy, appendix A. Read this as it really clarifies this point. I do want to make sure we focus equally on rewards as well as sanctions.

3. Facilities

Q: When will the English and Drama Block be refurbished and can it include a water fountain

Q: When will the English toilets be improved?

We are working on a 3-5 year strategic plan and 'engaging and eco-friendly environment' is one of our targets.

I have introduced 'Captain's Rounds' where I walk an area of the school every month. I have now covered every area, with the exception of the outdoor spaces. The repairs/changes you have seen (the ceiling by the lockers in English, the boarding at the top of the MFL stairs window, the lights being replaced) are a result of this. I will continue to do this throughout my time at AHS.

I am aware that some areas have not been done for some time: English, Drama, Music and the Art department. These are now at the top of the list for refurbishment. Some are straightforward and we hope to improve these very soon. Some may require structural work so will take a little longer.

What can you do to help?

Make sure we are not wasting resources repairing things that have been damaged due to a lack of thought/respect.

Report any breakages (toilet locks not working, no soap). We are going to develop a student reporting system.

As a principle I want the student toilets to come up to the same standard as staff toilets. I also want them treated as such.

Q Can we have more water fountains in the school?

We want to remove all bottled water and have more water fountains around the school to facilitate this. The Eco-group, with Ms Taylor our Facilities Manager, are currently looking at where we have mains water to allow this to happen.

I am also looking at having AHS water flasks for students to purchase and personalise.

I hope that by September this will have started to make a difference to the availability of water fountains. Watch this space!

Q: Why does the wi-fi never work?

I simply don't think this is true. If you have an issue with wi-fi talk to a member of staff or report this to the IT team. We spent a lot of money upgrading the wi-fi in 2019 to address the issue of the past; it is a lot better now.

4. Security

Why don't we have a lock down procedure?

The simple reason is that it is not possible to do one with the current security that we have in place. As a priority I want to change the security of the perimeter of the school. This will include all external entrances being closed during the school day (0845-1530)

I have already extended the hours when Reception is manned (07.00-17.00) so that it is no longer possible to walk through Reception unchallenged.

I have introduced lanyards for the Sixth Form so that all adults are identifiable as members of AHS, or have a visitor lanyard.

I hope we have a culture of challenging anyone we see who is not wearing a lanyard: 'Can I help you, are you looking for Reception?'

Once we have the perimeter of the school secured we are looking at securing the individual buildings and classrooms (with tumbler locks). At that point we can review a lock-down procedure.

It should be noted that current Police advice for a threat is 'Run, Hide, Tell' and a lock-down is not necessarily the best response to such a threat. This will be evaluated before introducing a new procedure.

5. Phones and Chromebooks

Q: Can we have phones and chromebooks at lunchtime?

No student needs to use a phone during the school day. If you need to contact home then come to the office or ask a member of staff. Phones pose safeguarding issues and this is the main reason we do not allow them to be used in school.

Chromebooks can be used by Years 8-11 at break and lunchtimes. This is to complete work.

Many staff and students see it as important to get outside and socialise rather than spend all of the school day on screens. Clubs and activities are there to encourage this but just talking to friends and relaxing is important at these times too.

Q: Can you make the restrictions on our chromebooks more lenient? So we can access sites/videos we need in lessons.

We are allowing staff to approve videos for use at AHS. We have to have robust safeguarding procedures in school and this drives our access to certain sites. We constantly look at this and try to strike the right

balance. If there is something you think will be useful for lessons, please speak with your teacher and if it is appropriate, they can ask IT to allow certain apps.

6. Canteen

Q: Why is the pre-order machine usually not available?

Before we closed we had a significant issue with staff absence in our caterers. This meant it was not possible to run the pre-order system.

There was also concern before we installed the sanitiser of using the touchscreen with the risks of Coronavirus.

This service will be reinstated as soon as we return.

Q: Could the canteen label the food more precisely to show exactly what's in the food and roughly how much there is of the certain ingredients?

This was addressed in the last meeting: see minutes of previous meeting

Q: Can we have some cheaper options in the canteen?

Some suggestions from students would be useful here. In the last Student Voice minutes we said: 'We would like to arrange a working party of vegetarian/vegan students who can discuss menu options. Please email Mrs Wilkes if you would be willing to be part of this working party.' To date we have not had a single volunteer: please email Mrs Wilkes if you are willing to be part of this group.

7. Image/Marketing

Q: When is the school video on the website going to be updated?

This was on my list of things to do this year. With the school now being closed we may have to delay this until September but it will be done by Christmas 2020. I agree it looks very dated and doesn't reflect the current AHS.

8. Collaboration increased between AHS and other schools/the outside world

Q: Can there be more collaboration between AHS and AGS?

Mr Sturgeon and I met, along with both chairs of Governors to look at this very issue.

We want to maintain the shared events we do have (The Year 11 and 13 Ball, The joint performances) and also look for new opportunities in the curriculum and more widely.

This is already happening more than some are aware:

- We use their facilities (squash and swimming)
- We share a groundsman
- We share lessons (Drama, Product Design, Ancient History and Dance)
- We have joint events (Christmas Concert, junior discos, orchestral events and joint productions as well as some exchanges)
- We are looking to combine our provision over the Easter holiday during the Coronavirus lockdown

We will look to do more together over the coming months and years.

9. Behaviour marks and equipment marks

Q: Why are we not allowed to see behaviour and equipment marks?

It isn't that you are not allowed, rather the system we currently use doesn't make this easy. I think that you should be aware of equipment and behaviour marks so you know how to improve. I will look into how we can change this to make them more visible to students.

10. Coach Park

Q: Why was nothing done by the marshalls with the recent incident?

Be aware that they are employed by BCC, not AHS, AGS or the Grange School.

As I wasn't there I don't know what was done by them. However I have spoken to all the marshalls and Bucks CC about the need to be more alert and to phone 999 if an incident occurs. I have made this expectation very clear.

You will have seen the Leadership Team there since the incident and we are reviewing how we staff this.

Some students did the right thing and intervened, others did not. There is a quote by Edmund Burke about the need to do the right thing: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good people to do nothing." and I would hope that everyone in the coach park would behave differently if we turned the clock back.

11. Sixth Form Issues

Q: Why can't we park in the music school?

I am looking at the possibility of reintroducing some sort of permit scheme next academic year (September 2020). In the past non-compliance has caused issues for us so we need to make sure we get this right. There are a limited number of permits and priority will be given to students with a genuine need to park in the car-park. Permits will not be issued for the full year as this is unfair on students that have later birthdays (and so pass their driving test later).

Q: I am free Period 1 why do I have to come into school?

Q: I am free periods 4 and 5, why can't I go home?

Q: Other schools seem to be able to get enough funding, whilst allowing their 6th Form to be offsite, whenever they don't have lessons. Why can't AHS do this?

There are 2 aspects to these questions:

Firstly we are a school community, not a college and as such registering as a form, attending assembly and being part of the school community is part of the AHS Sixth Form experience. This is a 'package' rather than a 'pick 'n' mix' so is accepted as a whole. I believe that being in school for these community events is important. It is not that we can't allow students home due to funding, it is because we don't agree with the principle.

The same is true for allowing students to go home as soon as they have finished their lessons.

There is no such thing as a free period: they are self-study periods. One of the biggest differences between GCSEs and A Levels is that you need to spend as long on independent studies as you do in lessons. We do allow students to go home after lunch once they have demonstrated that they can use their time independently. We want students to develop the skills they will need to thrive at university or in an apprenticeship or career. These include independence and self-motivation. As such we allow this freedom. However we are also aware that a structure allows students to focus on their studies and co-curricular enrichment and that this is valued by many students.