

## Haywood Academy

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Principal: Mr Mike Dawes



part of the

7 September 2022

Dear Parent/Carer

Haywood Academy is committed to ensuring the wellbeing and safety of its students. In understanding the pressures on our community of families as the cost of living continues to escalate, we have invested heavily this year in making sure that none of our children go without - understanding completely that we will all feel the pinch this winter and wanting all of our children to be protected in so far as we are able.

As part of this commitment, we consulted with parents first about the look and cost of our previous uniform. Knowing what your parameters were, we consulted with focus groups of young people and then undertook a whole academy survey where we provided examples of uniform to ascertain the most popular look for our young people so that they could feel proud when they wore it in September. From that, we engaged with suppliers over costs. Buying a new school uniform is expensive. It's why the government has changed the law around branded items and affordability with high street alternatives. Knowing what we already knew about the rising numbers of our families who were struggling with the cost of living, accessing foodbanks, requesting hygiene hampers and not being able to afford to feed their children, we decided we wanted to go further than just funding the traditional Year 7 jacket for our new intake.

In changing the uniform to reflect the feedback from parents and children, we were able to pay for a branded uniform bundle for every child in our academy, all 1100 young people. For key stage 3 students, we paid for a tie, jumper and PE top and for key stage 4, we paid for a tie, new jacket and PE top. To ensure that we kept costs to parents minimal, we removed any other branded items and changed the colour to black for trousers so that high street alternatives were more readily available, meaning that the burden of uniform expense to parents could be limited to just a few pounds and for those families we knew were already struggling, we also offered to pay for those items too. This cost is not something that normally sits in our academy budget but it is a commitment that we felt was necessary during such difficult times.



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# Haywood Academy

Inspiring Creativity & Achievement



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Losing the school skirt from the uniform was considered carefully. Ultimately the decision came down to warmth through the winter. Last year, we were aware of a growing number of young people who could not afford to purchase tights to wear underneath their skirts during the winter. Further to this, being teenagers, our young people don't always choose to wear a coat or we anticipate, could necessarily afford one this winter. In wearing trousers, we could at least ensure that there was an extra layer of clothing that would prevent children being this cold as they walk to and from school.

As you will understand, the concept of 'uniform' is intended to be inclusive. Ensuring that our children look and feel smart supports their confidence, resilience and approach towards their studies. We will all remember the anxiety we felt as young people around fitting in and making friends - that is even more acute these days, for so many reasons. By removing the choice around a skirt, there was no risk of young people electing to wear one because their friends were and then having to be cold through the winter because their family's financial situation was more severe. Whilst we could accept that parents/carers will buy skirt or trousers to reflect individual choice, we cannot underestimate peer power from your children and skirts could easily become contentious. We did not want anyone to be in a difficult position here.

We are conscious that we are a school at the heart of our community. That is why we've gone further this year to step up for you when financially in households, things are becoming much harder - especially when we don't know to what extent this will reach. We have subsidised food costs and ensured that we have food and drink available every day for every child, regardless of whether or not they qualify for free school meals. We have worked with local charities to ensure that we can provide a hygiene bank, we will have a full and extensive range of after school activities in place by half term to make sure that our school day is extended sufficiently so that children can be warm and dry.



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We are anticipating that things for our families will be harder this year than they've ever been before and as a result, we have made choices and commitments so that no child misses out whilst they are with us. If we have upset some young people in the process by removing the right to wear a skirt to school, it has not been because we are unreasonable or thoughtless, it has been because in planning to protect the dignity for all of our community, we have had to make choices. I am happy to discuss with any parent / carer this decision further. I have not been approached by the press to discuss this and have previously not gone into this level of detail with you - and perhaps I should have - because I wanted to uphold that feeling of dignity for us all. Members of my staff and I have known what it is like to have to ask for help and I want to make that normal for everyone with no stigma attached. Indeed, if you can help us to support our community further during this time, I am keen to explore that with you too. We are all in this together and our objective is only ever to help your child get the best from their time with us.

Yours sincerely

Mr M Dawes  
Principal  
Haywood Academy and City College

