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Dear Parents

I'm writing to you all about a number of concerns that have been expressed within the local community, some of which have been reported within the Barnsley Chronicle. The concerns have been related to the number of teachers leaving the school, the amount of supply used over the last year, behaviour of students, litter within the community and the examination results over the last few years. What I will do is briefly address each of those concerns.

Teachers leaving Darton High School: Eleven teachers are leaving Darton High School at the end of this year. That includes four members of the NUT whose retirement was part of the settlement between the Local Authority and the union.

This is not a high number. It is typical of a large secondary school. A number of our local schools have had a larger turnover than that in recent years. The national average for secondary schools is actually eight. Teachers leave for a variety of reasons and Darton is no exception. We have a teacher becoming a fulltime mother after the birth of her child. One is moving to a school closer to their home. Another is moving abroad. Additionally two staff are moving onto new posts in the area.

Darton High School has had a very low turnover of teachers over the past few years and the average age of the staff was becoming high. This situation is not always healthy. Schools need an influx of new ideas and expertise. In fact a number of Darton's outstanding teachers joined the school only last year.

As teachers leave it becomes important to appoint high quality replacements. We now have a policy of only appointing teachers who are good or outstanding (by Ofsted standards) rather than simply satisfactory. We see all new teachers teach at least one lesson. We put a lot of time and effort into securing the best possible staff.

September 2008 will see a strong staff team at Darton. The school is very pleased with the appointments that have been made up to now. We have appointed new Heads of Department in music and geography. We have appointed three new English teachers. Two new science teachers have been appointed. A new PE teacher was appointed last week.

Additionally we are interviewing for a new art teacher and a new MFL teacher later this week. Both vacancies have attracted a strong field.

Before we break up for summer we are anticipating appointing teachers to fill the remaining vacancies and therefore we expect to be fully staffed at the start of September 2008.



Supply: This has been a problem over the last year. We have had a number of staff ill for more than a few days. At that point the only thing a school can do is to bring in supply teachers and obviously that is not ideal. Students are best supported when they have the same teacher all the time. This has affected some subjects more than others. In particular English has been a problem. Although we were fortunate to secure two excellent supply teachers for English over the last year, we all know it is best to have high quality permanent specialists. We have been able to appoint three new English specialist teachers and this should ensure that problem does not re occur. Overall we expect there to be a lot less supply teachers in Darton High School from September 2008 onwards.

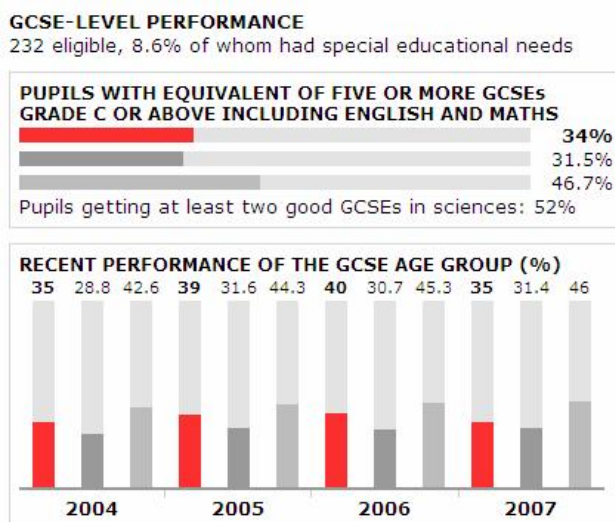
Student behaviour: We know this has been a concern of many parents. Although when we have been inspected, behaviour has always been described as good overall, we know some students have behaved poorly both inside school and throughout the community.

At Easter we opened our brand new Inclusion Area. This is a suite of rooms that bring together all our staff who support students' behaviour in school. This team of staff are now working more closely together. We are improving our procedures for dealing with unacceptable behaviour. We can now offer 'internal' exclusion for the first time. We are working hard at ensuring that all boys & girls who attend Darton High School work to the best of their ability and are not hindered by the behaviour of others.

Litter: This has become a problem around Darton High School as with many other secondary schools. We need to work with our premises staff, our neighbours, yourself as parents and especially the students to encourage them to drop less letter and to make sure the school collects what has been dropped. We are currently looking to employ more staff to work on the grounds, install more bins and get students more aware of the problems they cause.

This is an issue where you can help by talking to your own child about the importance of putting rubbish in bins. It's their school and neighbourhood they are spoiling by being thoughtless.

Examination results: As I write this letter the standard of education in secondary schools is making news headlines around the country. The government has (somewhat unfairly, in my view) described schools who have less than 30% of their students achieving five or more A*-C grades (including English & maths) as failing. Fortunately our examination results are better than that as can be seen below:



KEY:

- █ Darton High School
- █ Barnsley average
- █ National average

You can also see that the results from Darton have remained largely the same over the last few years; that is above the average for Barnsley but below the national average. As there is no

reason whatsoever why Darton students should perform below the national average, that shows where the school should be aiming. Darton High School needs to improve its GCSE results to match national GCSE results at the very least.

There is real confidence that this year's results will be an improvement on last years at both KS3 & KS4 (GCSEs). This year we had excellent attendance in both sets of exams (over 99% in both) and our students were the best prepared they have ever been. The KS3 results are planned to be released to the school on the 8th July and the GCSE results on the 21st August.

I hope what I have written has re-assured you on the issues you have raised.

To ensure we are more aware of community concerns and work more closely with our neighbours we are currently forming a Darton High School Community Forum, with Councillor Linda Burgess as chair. Additionally a Parents' Forum has just been established that will be another way the school will improve its work with yourself.

As well as that Darton High School is looking forward to becoming an Advanced Learning Centre. This brand new building will open in 2010 at a cost of £25-30 million. It will offer state-of-the-art facilities for the students, staff & wider community. At that time the school will no longer be an 11-16 school, but will be offering post-16 courses as well, to become an 11-19 school.

The Governors and myself are very positive about Darton High School's future. We are confident that the quality of education we offer will be even better over the next few years and we look forward to working with you all to achieve that.

If you have any questions or comments about what I have written please do get in touch with me. You can do this by writing to the school (Churchfield Lane, Darton, Bamsley, S75 5EW) or phoning the school (01226 382568) and asking to speak to me. Alternatively you can e-mail me on s.hill@barnsley.org.

With very best wishes.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Simon Hill', written in a cursive style.

Simon Hill.
Headteacher.