

Parent engagement evening

Monday 11 November 2024

Pre-meeting questions (and answers)

General

- Why do you need questions in advance, surely you should know the policies well enough on the spot. Having the questions beforehand allows us to investigate concerns in advance of the meeting and also to collate similar concerns into a full response for parents/ carers. It also gives parents and carers who are unable to attend in person the opportunity to engage in the process.
- Reading the minutes from the PAC meeting how can you say it's representative when there's so few parents at the meeting? Shouldn't you be inviting more on? We have discussed whether extending the group is now warranted. However, we're only coming up to our fourth meeting, so keeping a stable core team also has its advantages. Even if the PAC had 40 members, there would always be a view or background not represented. The PAC hopes to represent the views of a cross section of parents, but it doesn't aim to represent every possible view.
- Also PAC why do you seem to be ignoring the input of the pac members, why recruit people if you're going to ignore them. I'm sure there's similar LGC minutes. Not ignoring the PAC's advice, but there isn't a veto there either. In the vast majority of cases I will either heed their advice or adapt my plans to take into account their advice. We have agreed that future agenda items will be clear about whether something is information only, or completely open for debate.
- Why is the school complaints policy so difficult many parents don't understand the process so many complaints aren't deemed as such by the school and therefore not needing to be reported to Ofsted. Ofsted do not ask about complaints from parents when inspecting, the remit for handling unresolved complaints lies with the Educational Skills Funding Agency once all other steps to resolve are completed. Even then, the ESFA only ensure that the school has followed its policy, they do not comment on the content of the complaint. The process is quite simple (1) try to resolve informally, (2) complete appendix 1 (principal response), (3) complete appendix 2 (regional director response), (4) Final panel (5) ESFA. The flow diagram on page 4 outlines this. What a lot of complaints miss out is how they want the concern to be resolved – if it is not resolvable, then it doesn't fall within the complaints policy.
- Why is the school still so shocking at communicating with / responding to parents eg an incident was reported last Tuesday at 12.15pm but there was radio silence

until a woefully inadequate email late Friday afternoon I think we have to recognise that most staff are teachers and teach a timetable. They are not available immediately. We aim to acknowledge communication within 48 hours and respond fully within five days. If anyone is not happy with the response, then they can naturally escalate it.

- Will any questions asked by parents in advance but not covered on the night receive a personal response? Yes, I will publish the responses to all questions in the newsletter.
- With the Education Minister looking at the way Trusts are running schools into the ground, with reports of teachers leaving trusts at an alarming rate and our 6th formers voting with their feet, will the school now Soften their behaviour policies ie detentions for untucked shirt (Mr M did this himself to a lad who had just come out of the toilets.) I probably did do this, because the detention is for deliberately wearing the shirt completely out. I have not softened my approach; I am merely implementing the approach as advertised – the policy states that accidental infringements only receive a reminder (zero points).
- Why does the LGC report that the school has 0 pupils with serious health conditions when there are many? When the report was written, there weren't any students with serious health conditions (ie those who receive additional support via section 19 of the Education Act 1996).

Sixth form

- Is the school concerned and reflecting on the falling sixth form roll? What action is being taken to offer students a real choice to want to stay at the Ivo in KS5?
- The low number of students entering the sixth form this September is very concerning. Why do you think the numbers are so low?

No school wants their sixth form numbers to reduce, and definitely not as significantly as they have done this year. We have reflected a lot on what probably happened, and adapted our processes for this year. Some of this was raised in the [Newsletter 4 October 2024 – Astrea St Ivo](#). Changes include:

- Earlier consultation on the subject blocks and confirmation of structure to provide clarity earlier in the year
- A commitment to run all courses listed “no matter what” - so students can have confidence that their chosen courses will happen in September 2025
- Movement to a five-block rather than four-block system to increase subject combination choices

- Investment in the sixth form facilities
- Events and activities for years 7-11 to raise awareness of the sixth form and the difference between it and the main school.

Here is the destinations data we have for our previous year 11 cohort

- Unknown – 53
- Cambridge Regional College – 77
- St Ivo – 36
- Hills Road – 29
- Long Road – 38
- Hinchingsbrooke – 8
- Northstowe – 14
- Impington Village College – 8
- Others – 21

“Others” are single things like the navy, St Ives United, CAST, College of West Anglia, Alconbury school, Boston United FC, Chesterton etc.

For information, we are led to believe that Cambridgeshire Regional College and Huntingdon Regional College are oversubscribed, have a waiting list and are unable to take more students.

Most of the feedback on reasons for going is anecdotal, from discussions with students. We must be mindful as well that students may not wish to state the real reason for leaving. We are aware of the following reasons:

- To study a subject that we do not/ no longer offer
- Did not reach the entry requirements
- Could not study the course combinations desired
- Wanting to be with friends
- Wanting a change – either from their perception/ experience of the main school or a genuine wish to broaden their horizons
- Perception that a different institution has better facilities/ teaching/ pathways to university etc
- Wanting to be in a college-type establishment (rather than in a school-based sixth form)
- Negative narrative/ perceptions of the school externally

Reasons for staying:

- Pastoral support – we know them
- Great relationships with specific teachers
- Teaching support
- Smaller classes
- No need to travel

Further details of why students are happy with us are provided below:

- *“Sixth form at St Ivo, gives you the independence and freedom you need in a calm and comfortable environment to focus on what’s important in your next steps, as well as the amazing leadership team who make the sixth form an enjoyable place to be with multiple clubs and activities that everyone gets involved in.”*
“I like the Ivo Sixth Form because I am given lots of freedom, with a great environment to learn and make friends with the year 13.”
“In this first month of Ivo sixth form I have really enjoyed my time here. I thought it might be similar to secondary school but it is very different. You have a lot of freedom and independence, the classes are a lot smaller and easier to get the support you need.”
“My favourite thing about sixth form is the sense of community.”
“The thing I like most about the sixth form is how calm and laid back it is. The lessons are so much more different compared to the lower school especially because the classes are much smaller and concentrated.”
“I’m really enjoying sixth form, I think it’s been a really nice experience so far, I’ve enjoyed having more freedom and having smaller classes which gives you the chance to talk to your teachers more if you need help and advice on anything.”
“Sixth form is a great experience, you receive opportunities from the start, as well as a new level of freedom and independence.”
“Sixth form is a great option for further education, the freedom and the independent learning is refreshing. There are lots of new opportunities that are given too you, and it is overall better if you live in St Ives”
“Sixth form gives you a lot of independence to allow you to choose what you want to do when you want to do it. It allows you to go outside your comfort zone and get a better feel of what you want to do for further education. You get the welcoming support from all of your peers and teachers. Therefore, it is a nice environment within the sixth form area.”
“I’ve enjoyed sixth form as you get more freedom, and teachers treat you with a lot more respect.”

"I find that the teachers are incredibly supportive and if you need help you can receive the attention you need straight away."

- Why aren't they going to confirm available 6th form subjects for next year until the Feb when the deadlines are Jan - how can students possibly risk putting the Ivo down when their subjects may not run? Students can apply to more than one school for sixth form. The timeline I have outlined includes deadlines, if we can move things forward we will. For example, the subject list and blocks will be released this week.
- Again 6th form some current year 12s were turned away (some even on mock results – no one was refused entry on mock results) when they went on to exceed the Ivo requirements, these pupils went on to more successful colleges- will the Ivo commit to NOT doing that this year? Anyone who meets the entry requirements may attend.

Teaching and learning

- Can you share more information about the tutor quizzes and how this will have a genuine impact on student outcomes? How will action planning be individualised to meet students learning gaps with whole class feedback?

The tutor quizzes are just one aspect of our focus on 'fluency' this term. This links into our work on curriculum which has been ongoing for over a year and is now maturing into core, agreed curriculum in many subjects. In many subjects, debate and discussion around the exact nature of this is expected and healthy; curriculum evolves all the time. However, we also want our students to have a secure base of foundational knowledge that they can build upon. Having fluent recall of that knowledge helps them to connect new knowledge to it and as they become more fluent, they can apply that knowledge in different ways. We have spent the first half term amending and updating knowledge organisers which link to each subject's curriculum map. We have sent out the link for these on a redesigned part of the academy website. We have also asked HoDs to submit the first set of questions that test the foundational knowledge in their subjects. The weekly tutor quizzes record an overall score because they are a combination of all subjects. Form tutors are not experts in every subject, nor would it be organisationally possible for them to record the individual results for 15 questions for all 30 tutees every week. Therefore, the purpose of tutor quizzes is to point students and families towards our knowledge organisers, build a scholarly culture and provide opportunities to reward students for good recall or making good progress in their recall. We have bought into Sparx and Carousel which allow subjects to set recall homework which does

provide data on which questions or topics. Teachers can quickly see which areas they need to go over or reteach. Subjects also carry out “Do Now” tasks every lesson which are based upon retrieval – the exact nature of these is down to the teacher/ department but our expectation is that teachers are actively observing student answers and then dealing with errors or misconceptions in a supportive way. We call this ‘active observation’ and provided CPD for all staff on this last week.

- How will the recently published Oracy report (<https://oracyeducationcommission.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/We-need-to-talk-2024.pdf>), highlighting the importance of learning through speaking and communication, be reflected in the curriculum at St Ivo, given the 'silence is golden' rule?

There still seems to be some misunderstanding around our “Silence is golden” approach – we only expect silence when students are working independently. Our teaching and learning approach centres around “means of participation” which expects students to be actively engaged in lessons. We have focussed on aspects of oracy in staff training over the last 12 months. We have focused on disciplinary literacy and the unique challenges of talking and writing like a subject specialist. Departments have reflected upon the key vocabulary that unlocks their subject and have taught words via etymology or prefixes, suffixes for example – key vocabulary is included in knowledge organisers. We actively encourage the regular use of turn and talk followed by class discussion. We are focused not just on the regularity of opportunities for discussion but the quality of those discussions and have asked staff to reflect upon their approach to paired and class discussion. We have also focused on techniques like ‘right is right’ and ‘stretch it’ which encourage teachers to challenge students to express themselves accurately and with confidence and sophistication.

Uniform

- Can you explain the rationale for choosing a new uniform provider where costs are now on average of 41% higher (even on 24/25 P&B prices), with more branded items than before, if the school state this would reduce costs for parents? Uniform is now costing parents more not less. I think I’ve explained this many times in the newsletter. However, provided below is a full run down (copied from my response to a query sent to the MP):

For context, here is a breakdown of my communication with parents/ carers about the new school uniform:

- The WB 16/10/2023 newsletter introduced the PE kit on PE days consultation and stated that "This change will form part of a larger conversation with parents, carers and students about every aspect of the current uniform policy.":
<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/xI9vyABOJEqIDYst?ref=Link>
- The WB 05/02/2024 newsletter started the main consultation on the uniform, with a closing date of 23/02/2024: <https://sway.cloud.microsoft/ywRtbEEtFHPgl19O?ref=Link> In this newsletter I stated that: "The changes we are considering will reduce the overall cost of the school uniform, reduce the number of branded items that parents and carers are asked to buy..." In hindsight, it might have been better for me to say, "should reduce" rather than "will reduce". The statement is based on a rationale that was later shared via the 14/06/2024 newsletter (see below).
- The WB 26/02/2024 newsletter thanked the 255 students, staff and parents/ carers who responded to the consultation; 71% were partially or completely in favour of the changes:
<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/vqDfaOiSDYgDv2pO?ref=Link>
- The WB 04/03/2024 newsletter provided further information about the consultation, the outcome and to answer any further queries posed by parents/ carers:
<https://sway.cloud.microsoft/0QmOGIquvXwGeP7O?ref=Link>
- The 27/03/2024 newsletter addressed concerns about no longer having clip-on ties:
<https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-27-march-2024/>
- The 03/05/2024 newsletter launched the updated uniform part of the website and explained that year 8 - 11 parents/ carers would only need to purchase the new long bottoms for PE if they choose to wear them. If parents/ carers do not wish to buy the tracksuit pants/ leggings then their children can either come in their normal PE shorts/ skirts if it is warm enough or in their normal uniform and get changed for PE if it isn't warm enough:
<https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-3-may-2024/>
- The 10/05/2024 newsletter had a section about compiled uniform FAQs from parents/ carers: <https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-10-may-2024/>
- The 17/05/2024 newsletter gave clarification about the new ties and highlighted our try-before-you-buy dates: <https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-17-may-2024/>
- The 24/05/2024 newsletter gave additional information about the new ties, and how to donate old uniform for reuse: <https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-24-may-2024/>
- The 07/06/2024 newsletter launched the new supplier's website, including costs:
<https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-7-june-2024/>
- The 14/06/2024 newsletter addressed parent/ carer concerns about costs and gave them more information about the rationale and the true long-term costs of the uniform - see the section "Uniform changes – more detailed background information":
<https://www.astreastivo.org/newsletter-14-june-2024/>

Here is a breakdown of our branding of uniform items (compared to last year):

- Blazer - still branded, but the previous one was almost branded twice (school logo and house colour) making it less easy to pass on; now the blazer is the same for everyone (so the amount of branding has reduced)
 - Tie - still branded (purchased by the school for years 8-11, so no additional cost to current parents/ carers)
 - Shirt - wasn't branded, still isn't
 - Jumper - was branded, now isn't, therefore, this is a reduction
 - Trousers/ Tailored shorts - weren't branded, still aren't
 - School bag - wasn't branded, now is (for year 7); the price is quite cheap compared to other sports brands and the school has paid for students to have their initials embroidered on the bag; therefore, whilst this is an increase in branded items, the increase does not come with an increase in cost
 - Skirt - was branded, still is, but we have made it clearer that this is optional and not a compulsory item (girls are free to wear unbranded trousers or tailored shorts)
- Therefore, the number of compulsory branded items for girls is the same as that for boys, and I can confirm that branding overall has reduced.

The PE kit has the same number of branded items:

- Instead of a branded polo shirt, a branded hoodie and branded rugby shirt we've moved to only a branded polo shirt and 1/4 zip top
- The shorts/ skorts are still branded
- The longer bottoms have always been optional, and whilst students were free to wear any plain black/ dark blue/ dark grey bottoms or leggings before, if they choose to wear these now, we are asking parents/ carers to purchase the branded versions to keep PE kit uniform, uniform

I can also confirm that the school is providing financial support to parents/ carers in need, above and beyond those eligible for free school meals.

- Last week I ordered the PE joggers and the size was wrong. This meant it cost me £16.25 in postage for one pair. 2x postage costs of £6.50 and 1x return cost of £3.25. The shop is too far away to justify a trip for one item. I believe we have mentioned in the newsletter previously that items can be sent to school for collection, hence removing any postage costs.
- In total they cost £37.25 because they are so expensive (£21). I am late buying these. Why have families' concerns about the cost, cost of delivery, size and quality of the PE joggers and leggings not been listened to and families are still expected to purchase these or students face a detention? It is an entirely unreasonable burden on a family and should have been immediately adjusted once it came to the

school's attention. We have tried to reduce the burden on parents/ carers as much as possible by providing financial support for those with the greatest need.

- It seems that PE activity (eg slides in dance) is having to be limited because of issues with the new PE bottoms getting damaged - this seems the wrong way round. Surely the uniform should be designed to fit the activity, not the activity be limited to cope with the uniform? This has only become an issue since the PE uniform was changed. Any garment would wear down if they were regularly worn whilst sliding across fields or a wooden floor.

Behaviour

- Why is the behaviour policy still not being implemented consistently? Some teachers appear to use it with common sense whilst with others there is no room for any flexibility or acknowledgement that these are children, who are not perfect and are still learning. For instance, a teacher saying to our child anyone who gets a question wrong will get a reminder Versus a teacher giving house points for putting their hand up and trying to answer a question. "Human error" has been cited for mistakes made by the school but perfection is expected from our children 100% of the time.

Perfection is not expected from students 100% of the time – they're developing human beings and will make mistakes from time to time. Please can you provide details of specific incidents so that we can address these concerns as what you describe is not how the behaviour policy should be implemented.

- Has there been an increase in detentions and lost lesson time due to reset sanctions because of 'uniform infringements' with reference to the new behaviour policy?

There was an initial increase in detentions for uniform infringements in September, and these only resulted in a reset if students failed to attend those detentions or failed to hand over confiscated jewellery etc. The sanctions have settled down since, as has the need to issue them.

- What support is there for parents whose kids are being bullied - they seemingly get ignored and the problem buried with victim shaming to the fore There is significant safeguarding and pastoral support for students experiencing unkind behaviour. I would actively encourage parents/ carers to work with the year team to resolve the concern, or speak to their SLT link if they are unhappy with the response. I would be happy to talk to any parent who is unhappy with the response they have received, but we can't discuss individual cases in a open event.

Curriculum and staffing

- When will Food Tech and Computer Science return to the curriculum for Y7,8 and 9? When will Computing lessons for Year 7 begin? If they will not be taking place this year, what is the reason for this? The teacher who is supporting exam courses in health and social care and child development won't be able to return to computing in any capacity until the end of the year when those exam classes have completed. We have been advertising for another computer science teacher but have so far had no viable candidates – we will continue to advertise. We now have two food teachers in school, but we will still advertise for another. We should be able to restore KS3 food classes from September 2025.
- How will you make up for lost learning? How will students in KS3 catch up on the learning they are missing this year in food tech and computing? We will have to review the content for the remaining years before GCSE courses start to ensure that students have the required foundational knowledge to study the course should they wish. This may mean reviewing whether some of the additional course content is strictly needed.
- Is the school concerned about the loss of so many experienced staff in recent years? If so, what are the trust/ school doing to ensure staff are valued, supported and want to stay at the school? There are several reasons why staff move on: promotion, moving location, new opportunities, wanting a new challenge. Some staff may move schools because they prefer a different approach. The school was previously overstaffed, and with so much of the school budget allocated to staffing in schools (around 80%), if you are significantly overstaffed then you can't divert funds to school improvement or curriculum delivery.

We are committed to making the St Ivo a great place for staff to work. We have made a concerted effort to collaborate with staff, to provide support and celebrate achievements. These are some of the other initiatives we have introduced (or are introducing):

- Buddy scheme
- Middle leaders' consultation meetings with open feedback
- Biscuit Fridays
- Hand-written Thank you cards
- Staff heroes - launching soon
- MS forms feedback on a variety of topics
- New opportunities for promotion eg lead practitioner roles, mentor roles for ITT
- Opportunities for CPD via NPQ and ELP (and others)
- EAP and Wisdom App

- Workload Charter for all staff – in line with our Trust’s approach of reducing workload for staff by providing high quality curriculum resources (that can be adapted at school/individual level if wished), opportunities for across Trust CPD in subjects, led by associates/leads, centralised behaviour system so that staff are free to teach and a ‘servant’ SLT to run the operational side of the behaviour system eg detentions, reset.
- Astrea pay 1% above national pay scales for teachers.