

Parents Forum Notes

12 October 2016

S Fell (Headteacher), R Holland (Chair of Governors), 15 parents

1. ICT Results 2016

Shawn Fell (SF) outlined an issue with the core OCR ICT First National Results in 2016. Mr Holland gave the Governing Body perspective. Parents asked questions about what happened, how it was investigated in school and what the outcomes were. Parents also asked about arrangements for students currently in year 11. In summary:

1. The OCR Examination Board took the view that too much assistance had been provided to students because they had completed their modules using templates, writing frames or guidance sheets provided by teachers.
2. This practice had arisen through a misinterpretation of the guidance notes/specification provided by the Examination Board. The practice in school had been accepted by the external moderator in 2015. The Board had not acted in 2015 but had questioned the practice in 2016.
3. An investigation was carried out by an Assistant Headteacher, in line with school procedures. A governing Body panel, supported by an HR advisor, considered the outcome of the investigation. The panel was convinced that this was not the result of malicious intent nor an attempt to cheat the system. The Examination Board acknowledged that the school's interpretation of the guidance notes was made in good faith. However, the panel found that the interpretation was wrong, and accepted that the Examination Board could not confirm marks for coursework as submitted. A parent felt that the Governing Body panel was not sufficiently independent and questioned why an external, independent body had not been brought in to carry out the investigation and make a judgement. Mr Holland explained that school/Academy policies and procedures had been followed.
4. A request was made for OCR to consider accrediting student work and an offer has now been made by OCR to certificate for the Cambridge National Award for all students based on the performance in the examination module R001. All students with a pass in the examination module are now eligible for the Award and will now receive this certificate.

Further action has been taken to offer students the opportunity to complete the remaining two modules (R005 and R007) and to ensure that this situation can not arise again. Specifically:

1. Resources and facilities for resubmitting coursework have been put in place, and students wishing to do this have received detailed information about the process.
2. Students submitting coursework in 2017 will carry out assessed work as if it is a Controlled Assessment and governed by the standards required for Controlled Assessments. Although this is not a requirement of the Board it will ensure conformity to the guidelines. A discussion highlighted that these arrangements may put students under additional assessment pressure in year 11, which is an already demanding GCSE year. It was identified that it would be possible for the school to be flexible with current year 11 assessment. Students could reduce the workload in ICT and seek accreditation for the award (i.e.

modules R001 and R002), rather than pursuing accreditation for the Certificate, which would require completion of assessed work in two further modules (R003 and R004).

3. It had already been decided that the 2017 cohort would be the last group to take this course and therefore it is not followed by current year 9 or year 10 students.
4. All staff in the ICT Department have been made fully aware of the correct interpretation of guidance relating to all coursework for all ICT courses. Changes to procedures will ensure this continues to be the case in future.
5. This is the first occasion that any such circumstances have occurred in the school. Nevertheless, it has been unacceptable. The specialist nature of OCR ICT coursework means that similar practice is unlikely to occur in other subject areas. However, the school's examinations policy and procedures will be reviewed and additional checks instituted which ensure that all teaching and support staff confirm their correct understanding of Examination Board regulations and guidance for all courses. There is no evidence to show that any incorrect practice exists, but this will allow the school to ensure that the very best practice is maintained and evidenced.

Action arising from discussion: explore the possibility of allowing students to choose accreditation for the Award (R001 and R002) as an alternative to the Certificate (+ R005 and R007)

2. Year 9 Testing on Entry

A question was asked about why year 9 students had several baseline tests during the first week in school. There was good induction in July with the transfer days, but it was felt that this testing made it more difficult for new students to settle in to the school. The abandonment of KS3 levels nationally was discussed and the fact that Harlington received students from 17 different feeder schools, all with different ways of measuring attainment and progress. SF explained that it was therefore essential that teachers had an accurate assessment point that allowed them to identify the comparable level of attainment for students from different schools. This was understood, but a request was made for this to be more fully communicated with parents in writing, rather than just verbally in July.

Action: Consider the timing of Year 9 baseline testing and investigate the possibility and implications of moving it back a week or two; communicate arrangements and rationale by email to parents at the start of the school year.

3. Communication

It was reported by a parent that there was an incident were there had not been a prompt reply to an email and that they had found it necessary to follow up with a phone call. Other parents felt that communication of staff changes should be routinely highlighted in termly and weekly newsletters, where teachers join and leave, and when more temporary arrangements are put in place. It was agreed this would be a good idea. SF said that he would welcome parents contacting him directly at any time about any matter, but particularly if there was a problem with communication.
(sfell@harlington.org)

Action: include staff changes and absences, where appropriate, in a timely way in termly and weekly newsletters.

4. Languages in the curriculum

A discussion took place about languages in the school curriculum. All agreed it was a valuable subject for most students, but it was also recognised that it was currently only studied to GCSE by a minority. Some felt that it should be a compulsory subject for most students. Others felt that it should be available to all, but should remain optional. There was no consensus about whether languages should remain optional, or if it should be made compulsory for some or all students.

Action: seek views from more parents using questionnaires at the upcoming year 9 parents evening and an on-line questionnaire for all parents.

5. Governing Body recruitment

Mr Holland informed parents that the Governing Body is recruiting and suggested that parents attending the Parents' Forum may wish to consider joining. He would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with interested parents. (rholland@harlington.org)

Next Meeting: Thursday 19 January 2017