

## FAQs on Vertical Tutor Groups (VTG)

### **What is Vertical Tutoring?**

Tutor groups are organised into groups of students of different ages – Y7-11 and for some of the time in our case, Y12 and Y13 as well.

### **Is this a new idea?**

No. Vertical tutoring is already established in schools nationwide. SLT have considered this for some time and believe there are significant advantages to it.

### **What are the advantages?**

We believe that the role of the tutor is central to developing successful relationships for learning. At the moment there are too many 'invisible' children, many of whom go through the system doing the right things day in, day out, and do not have at least one adult in the school that knows them well. Learning relationships between people (student, parents and tutors) are the basis for successful outcomes. Tutors are the key to learning as a whole school process and vertical tutoring will provide the time and structure to achieve this.

Other schools already using vertical tutoring report:

- A better family atmosphere in the school where everyone is approachable. Perceived obstacles to interacting with students of different ages have been removed.
- Peer mentoring happens naturally as older students talk to younger students about things such as option choices, preparing for exams, post 16 choices.
- Smaller year group clusters in each tutor group mean more time for tutors to mentor students as individuals about personal as well as learning matters.
- Students are provided with better leadership opportunities.

### **Will vertical tutoring split up existing friendships?**

In compiling the new groups students personalities, interests, abilities and friendships will be considered in order to create balanced groups and avoid anyone being isolated.

Tutor time only accounts for about 7% of the total school day so students will see other friends in lessons and will still be based in year group social areas for break and lunch times.

### **What does this mean for assemblies?**

House assemblies will be held with vertical tutor groups attending them, but there will be occasions when an entire year group may need to come together for specific events or information sharing e.g. Y8 Options Launch, Y10 Work Experience Launch, Post-16 HE events.

### **Won't younger students be negatively influenced by older students?**

Research, and feedback from other schools visited, suggests that the opposite is true. An in-group loyalty develops as students get to know each other and grow in confidence. Tutors will have responsibility, supported by the Pastoral Leaders, for making sure any unacceptable behaviour is addressed and that a strong tutor group 'bond' is maintained.

### **How many students will be in a tutor group?**

Initial plans are for each House to have 10 tutor groups and each tutor group to have about 25 students made up of clusters of approximately 4/5 students from each age group. Students will usually stay in the same tutor group for their whole school career to the end of Y11. We hope to have co-tutors (teaching and non-teaching staff) so that

students can be better supported and if staffing allowed we would increase the number of groups and reduce the number of students in each.

There will also be 10 Post-16 tutor groups made up of approximately 25 Y12 and Y13 students combined.

### **How will tutor time be organised?**

This is something that the Heads of House and SLT will work on together once appointments have been made to the Head of House roles, however, it is likely that each week there will be opportunities for basics checks, reading activities, a 'Raising Awareness Tutorial' (led by 6<sup>th</sup> form students), Character education, assemblies and inter-House activities.

### **Why can the tutor offer better support under this system?**

The VTG structure enables staff to get to know students, to recognise their achievements and address their concerns more effectively. Tutors can focus on small clusters of students as they approach significant points in their school life, for example, when Y8 students are making option choices the tutor will only have to offer guidance to 4/5 students instead of 28.

### **How do students of different ages work together and support each other?**

In VTGs students can learn a lot from each other. When Y6 students start their transition to the school they will meet and get to know older students which will reduce some of the fear they may have about being the youngest in the school again. When students coming to the end of KS3 or 4 are discussing their plans, older students can share their perspective on subjects and choices in an informal rather than a contrived way. In tutor time, and especially the opportunities for discussion of key issues and current affairs, students will learn to listen to, respect and learn from the views of others.

Very rarely in the rest of our lives do we operate only with people of the same age as ourselves so VTGs can be a good preparation for life beyond school.

### **What other benefits are there to the school community?**

The structure will offer further opportunities to extend House competitions in a range of activities. Recognition and sanctions will operate through the Houses, fostering a sense of loyalty and responsibility to others in the House. In this way we hope that vertical tutoring will develop positive values and a stronger community ethos.

### **What role will students have in implementing this?**

Following the launch to students via assemblies, all students will be able to share their concerns and ask questions in Challenge time. If it is felt necessary following this, some students may visit other schools already operating the system. Students will be involved in choosing the additional House name, in designing the re-vamped ties and in developing their House identity/motto. They can offer ideas for the Inter-House competitions and longer term will be able to apply for positions of responsibility in the House and adopt a House charity to support.

### **How will parents be involved in the implementation of the new structure?**

Parents have already been informed of the plans to move to vertical tutoring in a letter sent from the Head. Another letter will be sent once the Heads and Deputy Heads of House have been appointed and there will be a meeting for those who wish to attend to ask questions. Copies of documents used in the staff and student launch will also be made available to parents via the website.

### **Who will decide which tutor group students are placed in?**

Heads of House, SENDCO, Inclusion staff, current tutors and SLT will all contribute to the process.

**When will students find out which group/House they are in?**

Students will be informed by July and we hope to run the last couple of weeks of this school year in the new groups and Houses to prepare for a smooth start in September.

**Will vertical tutoring alleviate bullying? Could it become worse in smaller groups?**

We aim to reduce the number of incidents of bullying by promoting a team ethos within tutor groups and through vigilant and proactive management of the group by the tutor. Feedback from other schools already using the system suggests a reduction in bullying following the introduction of VTGs.

**Why has the new structure only been announced after parents of Y6 children made the choice to send their child to THS?**

Terms 1 and 2 were used to conduct research, consult with other schools and discuss the proposal within the SLT to ensure we were fully informed before moving any further with the plans. Unfortunately it was not possible to complete this before parents made their choices in the Autumn.

**Who will the additional, non-teaching tutors be? What are their qualifications to carry out this role?**

All of our support staff not currently working directly with children, will be asked if they would like to volunteer to be a co-tutor. They will be paired with a teacher tutor and will act under their direction. They will also attend the additional training for all tutors planned for the summer term. As is the case with anyone working in a school, all co-tutors will have undergone the necessary safeguarding checks to ensure their eligibility to work with young people.

**How will peer-mentoring be quality controlled to make sure influences are positive? How will students who are reluctant to do this be dealt with?**

We already operate peer mentoring with some students who have been given support and training to do this. This will be extended to a wider group. For students who are reluctant to participate there is no reason why peer-mentoring cannot be done in a small group rather than 1:1 so that a reluctant mentor can be supported by a student already experienced or more confident in this role. Heads of House and Assistant Heads (KS3/4/5) will be responsible for monitoring and quality assuring all activities conducted in tutor sessions through observation and feedback from staff and students.

**How will PSHE be taught to mixed-age groups?**

Teaching some topics within the PSHE curriculum to mixed-age groups can be beneficial as younger students can benefit from the experience and maturity of older students when learning. There will be occasions when students of a particular year group need to be brought together and the VTG system has the flexibility to allow for this. Where topics may need further development or differentiation for students of different ages, Relationships and Sex Education for example, these will be explored further in curriculum areas or through the use of assemblies or 'drop-down' days where students will be organised in same age groups.

**How will you ensure Y11-13 students, who are already under pressure with workload and preparation for exams, are not put under further pressure in this system?**

No unreasonable demands will be made of the older students in tutor time. In VTGs tutors will actually have more time to support KS4 and 5 students at key points in the year. In addition to helping students to achieve their potential in their academic studies we hope to produce well-rounded individuals with the skills and attributes to help them be successful in life. Working in VTGs and supporting younger students can help our older students prepare for this.

**Students in Year 11 will lose key friends. How will you deal with reduced morale as a result?**

As stated previously, tutor time actually takes up a very small proportion of the school day so although students may not be in the same VTG there will be many other opportunities throughout the rest of the school day when they will be able to spend time with each other.

**Will there still be additional pastoral support for students as Heads and Deputy Heads of House are often teaching?**

Financial constraints mean no additional staff will be recruited to support this system but we will maintain the support staff already working with the pastoral teams and continue to work with other agencies to provide additional support for students. For parents, the House system may actually make contact with school easier as the plan for siblings to be in the same House as each other means parents will only have one pastoral leader to communicate with.

**How will you ensure tutors tutor effectively, particularly those for whom tutoring is not currently their priority?**

All tutors and co-tutors will receive additional training in the summer term. Once the new system is up and running Heads of House and SLT will quality assure tutoring provision and identify any training needs so that further training can be on-going. In this way all tutors should feel confident in leading VTGs.

**Why was there no consultation with staff, parents or students before taking the decision to change the pastoral structure?**

Vertical tutoring is a school improvement strategy used in all the schools in the Redhill Academy Trust. Each school adapts the system to suit its own needs. Our work with the Trust and research with other schools using the system has led school leaders and governors to believe the system will bring many benefits to the students and the school.

**Will students have a say in who they are/are not grouped with?**

Even when only placing Y6 students into Y7 forms we cannot currently grant every individual's wishes about who they are placed with as many contradict each other. The same will be true with the students currently in the school. As we have done previously with Y6 transition, we will gather information from the staff currently working with the students, to ensure that they are grouped with at least one student that they can **work well** with.