

## Parents Meeting -11<sup>th</sup> January 2016

**Stoke Newington School:** Annie Gammon, Alan Macaskill, Rachel MacLehose, Gail Atkinson

**Stoke Newington School Governors and PTA:** Crispin Truman – Chair of Governors, Rose White - Governor , Caroline Stagg – Vice Chair of Governors, Kathy Manners – Chair of PTA

**Hackney Learning Trust:** Martin Buck – Head of Secondary HLT, Anne Canning – Director, Children, Adults and Community Health; also current Head of Hackney Learning Trust

Approximately 40 parents and carers

### Introduction- Annie Gammon

Thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and asked that everyone spend a minute thinking of our students.

The school is currently working its way through our loss, and the recent death has been traumatic for staff and students. Both deaths have been tragic but they are very different. One death was unexpected and the student concerned had not been receiving any counselling, whereas the other had known health issues over a long period. Neither of them had issues of bullying at school; exams were a factor in their lives, but not an overwhelming issue.

The Prime Minister made an announcement on Monday about the need for a focus on mental health, and some initiatives were described. However it is clear that we need to take some action now.

Counselling has been made available for Y11 students and staff – this will continue for as long as necessary. The School is ensuring that those students (in Years 11-13) that are known to CAMHS are also receiving additional support. It is a priority to ensure that students are aware that they have very positive options available to them and should be making positive healthy choices. Is also important to get the right balance between making sure that support is in place and ensuring that normality returns for students.

The School wants to ensure that it is as good as possible on pastoral and safeguarding issues. The School will be getting an external review done to examine what we have in place and if we should make any changes or improvements.

### Anne Canning

- Parents are the best support for students. They can help identify any issues, provide support and inform the school about what any issues may be.
- There will be an external investigation of events at the school. This is a formal process, independent of the school, run in conjunction with the HLT. Want to reassure parents that this will happen.
- There is a lot of support in place for students and staff and assistance will be given to help the school navigate through the various systems. It has been a tough year for the school and the year group.

### Martin Buck

- Reflected on the situation from a personal perspective. Martin has 2 children, now 28 years and 26 years who attended SNS. The children have sustained their friendship and support since leaving the school and this has been really important to them and the family.
- From a professional perspective, has been working with the school for the last 5 years and, from a strong base in the first instance, the school has become a bit more driven on standards, but pastoral support has also been given additional attention.

- From a personal and professional perspective, the school does a good job.

### **Rose White**

- Rose and her family has really valued the support of the school and the Y11 team since the death of Harry. The school has involved and consulted with the family throughout the process and this has been much appreciated.
- A charity is being set up for Harry using the money that has been raised by friends and family - more details will follow when available.

Parents spent some time considering issues in small groups before a wider discussion with questions raised by parents.

### **Questions**

#### **Q: How easy it is for children to access counselling, including those not close friends?**

A: Counselling is available for all Y11 students. A day-off timetable is also being considered for supportive positive sessions for all Year 11. More counselling resource is coming into school.

Suggestions:

- Counselling should be made available for everyone in Y11 in small groups as well as for some Year 9 groups. Need to also consider the wider friendship groups (such as those that have sustained from primary school, friends in other form groups).
- Counselling to be provided in friendship groups rather than larger groups
- "Suggestion box" should be made available for students to either self refer (if unable/unwilling to directly talk to teacher/member of staff) or for students to say if they have concerns about one of their friends.
- More counselling resource for the school

Response: The school will be sourcing more counselling, with support from Hackney, and will ensure that all Year 11 students access this in groups or individually. We will reflect on the Year 9 needs and put in place the same for them if appropriate.

#### **Q: Are assemblies the best way for sharing bad news? Could this be done in smaller groups?**

A: It is important that there is a consistent message goes out to all students which is why year group assemblies are used for such issues. We could consider if we could do this in smaller groups.

#### **Q: What is role of the Form Tutor**

A: This is a pastoral role, but they are also teachers. There are also 2 pastoral counsellors in the school. Form tutors get extra time to do this role, but we may need to create extra time for them during the coming weeks so that there is additional time for their pastoral role. We need to ensure that the offer for counselling is there for students and we need to resource and plan for this.

The school is also changing some of the processes for transition from primary schools, particularly for those children coming from more distant schools, to help support with friendship groups.

**Q: What is the advice for parents on how to help children through grief, and how do we (parents and school) spot the signs that children need additional support?**

A: The School will look at the Lifeskills provision and how bereavement and stages are covered, ensuring that it is clear that timelines for grief are very personal and individual. Assemblies have covered dealing with grief.

Children want to talk at different times, but need to be led by children. Children's grief is more immediate than adult. Then need to tease out what additional support is needed

Parents can contact the HOY or Form Tutor if they have any concerns about their child. There are regular Student Support Network for HOYs and pastoral counsellors at which the list of children needing support is reviewed and appropriate support allocated. We will deal with requests more urgently during this coming period.

Suggestions for medium term

- School can help support children settle in and involve parents in more social events such as the food and music evenings
- Could look at Charities such as Winstons Wish to see if they have material that could be used for children in schools for coping with loss
- Could consider whether this parent group can be a parental support group. Parenting has changed so much over the last 15 years and is even harder now. Could be some shared learning for parents about what it is to be a parent of Y7, 8, 9, 10, 11 etc and learn from each other.

Response: The school will take this forward with the PTA.

**Q: What support is available for parents? Some parents don't have support nearby.**

A: We can signpost to support (such as CAMHS and Firststeps) and help directly if child is part of a crisis situation. School can advocate for support.

Suggestions:

- New parents, particularly of Y7 students – lose the primary school playground link. Can we have register of "buddy parents" and to be friends/have contacts with and develop networks.

Response: The school will take forward buddying with PTA involvement.

There will be a list of sources of support on the website.

**Q: Can school take foot off pressure for Y11 (and others)? There is a lot of pressure on students at the moment?**

A: We will consider the balance of pressures on the Year 11 students.

Suggestions/Comments:

- Results agenda – children need some relief from the pressure of the results
- Concern about social media use. Social media is a new dimension compared to all of us, support from parents is both hearing from other parents but also from experts. We are having an expert session on substance abuse for parents next week; we will run a session on social media use in the next months.

**Q: If a child is identified for counselling, are parents notified? Are the 2 counsellors sufficient for now?**

A: SNS counsellors – have to contact parents. Drop in – no contact with parents, if there is a long term counselling sessions- parents will be informed. If students are still accessing the drop in sessions on 12/1/17, parents will be notified.

We will be looking at increasing support on temporary basis and then reviewing our long term provision.

**Q: Is there a clash between behaviour management and support?**

A: Behaviour management arrangements have been put in place largely in response to low level disruption. Behaviour management done properly makes a safer environment for all students.

**Q: How can the school move on from this?**

A: There will be a varied timeline for recovery, but we will put in place everything that we can to support.

**Q: Has there been any contact with other schools who have parallel experiences?**

A: The school has been talking to the HLT and is increasingly working with other schools to share learning, but on this matter there is only 1 other school in the Borough that has experienced such a tragedy as far as we are aware.

**Q: Future concerns**

A: We need to make sure that children know that these events are very unusual and is not normal. We want to make sure children make positive healthy choices and have problem solving skills. The mental health agenda is now high on the national agenda whereas it was barely discussed a few years ago.

## **Conclusions**

- The school wants to work in partnership with parents and the wellbeing of children is of utmost importance. Time will help, support will help and the School will be there to help children move on with optimism, confidence and resilience for the rest of their lives.

**Crispin Truman:** Thanked Annie, the School and the parents for their support