

November 2023

Headteacher - Patrick Earnshaw

Deputy Headteacher - Mathew Downs

Dear Parent/Carers

I know that as parents, carers and staff we essentially all want the same for our children – for them to be kept safe and prepared well for adult life. Young people today face many new pressures that were not such an issue when we were young. One area of concern we share with parents is about young peoples' access to drugs.

We have for many years educated students about substance use and abuse, through an age appropriate programme that educates and informs students about a range of current issues including how to stay safe from the dangers of drug use/substance abuse. This programme is delivered through assemblies, tutor period events and Ethical and Personal Development lessons.

In recent years greater prominence has been given in local news items about “county lines” drug dealing networks in the BCP and New Forest areas. Partly in response to the growing awareness of county lines activity in our local areas, some schools formed the ‘Hampshire Safe’ initiative within the New Forest locality and, whilst we were not invited to be part of this initiative, we have had positive feedback from the schools involved. One key objective, among several, of this initiative is to promote schools as safe havens free of illegal drugs.

Following careful consideration of the ‘Hampshire Safe’ initiative and aware of the increasing pressure some young people in our community might be facing about drugs in our local community, we increased our own preventative activity at Highcliffe School by regularly arranging a drugs detection dog to be in school. This is a preventative measure to ensure that our school remains safe, drug free and a healthy environment for all students to learn and develop.

The detection dog is highly trained, used to working in schools with children, and will always be with an expert handler. The dog and its handler will be accompanied by a member of the Leadership Team. They will move around the school from class to class and the shared areas, such as the Sixth Form, the library, toilets and study spaces. The dog is trained to indicate discreetly to their handler if a scent is identified. Should this happen, the handler will speak in confidence to the member of the Leadership Team accompanying them and the matter will continue to be dealt with sensitively from that point on.

If a child is indicated, we will contact their parents to let you know. If, on further investigation, substances were found and our concerns needed to be explored further under the various policies relating to drugs or prohibited items, we will keep their parents informed.

If your child is very nervous around dogs, please email office@highcliffeschool.com, so we can be sensitive to this.

I want to reassure you that drugs are not a serious issue at this school. However, with society changing around us, if we are to keep our school this way, we must be proactive. We are confident this measure, which we know through the ‘Hampshire Safe’ initiative and our experience last year, will help to continue ensuring the safety and well-being of our young people, a goal I am sure you share as parents.

If you have any questions about the dog handling visit, please contact Mr Downs, Deputy Headteacher.

Yours faithfully,



Patrick Earnshaw
Headteacher