

24 February 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

UK Youth Climate 'Strikes' – Friday 28 February 2020

Many of you will be aware that Greta Thunberg, the climate and environmental activist will be part of the student strike planned in College Green in Bristol this Friday.

Further to my previous communications on this, it is a difficult issue to balance for schools. We agree wholeheartedly with the sentiment of such action and are fully supportive of students being active participators on such important issues which will have a significant impact on their lives. However, the notion of a student 'strike' on a school day is inevitably problematic for schools.

We hold a strong position on the attendance of students at school to ensure the continuity of education and to sanction a day's absence from school would be contradictory to that position. We also have a duty of care to safeguard all students in our care and there are no guarantees as to the level of supervision, by the police or other authorities at the event. Please see the letter shared by Bristol Police last year which highlights their safety concerns. Friday 28 February is a normal school day and we expect students to be in school all day engaging with our curriculum.

We always look for ways to connect with our young people and last year we welcomed Junieth Maribel Leiva, a coffee grower from Nicaragua. She discussed with students how the temperature changes have exposed her crop to coffee 'rust', reducing the yield from her crop and therefore her income as a direct result of the changing climate. This week we welcome Gloria Gonzalez who works for the Julio Hernández Cooperative and will be talking to students about the importance of making a choice to support Fairtrade and the challenges of securing a healthy crop within variable and changing climates.

Our Drop Everything And Read article (DEAR) this week is deliberately on climate change to engage and develop student understanding and discussion. Our extended tutor time on Friday will be focused on Climate Change to identify the choices we can all make to reduce the impact of climate change. Our Eco Group is tackling our school issues and has recently secured new recycling bins for the canteen. They are currently producing posters to promote this change within our canteen service and have removed plastic bottles from the canteen. However, this has resulted in a carton recycling challenge which they are now considering - great resilience is being demonstrated by the group. If your child/children would like to make a difference and join the group they are more than welcome to join us in room 82 on a Wednesday lunchtime.

Thank you for your support in advance. Should you have any concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your sincerely



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Dear Headteachers,

As you will know that there has been a surge of support for protest and protest groups linked to the environmental impact of global warming. This is an important issue and naturally attracts the interest of young people who want to show they care about their planet and to influence those in power to do more.

Police have a duty to support protest set out in a range of legislation including the Human Rights Act. It is an important principle of our country that people can protest and the police role is to prevent Crime and Disorder not to prevent people expressing their views. In fact we positively facilitate protest on most occasions.

The main organisers for a series of Bristol based youth led protests have done a good job in mobilising young people to attend. They are following the guidance for organisers of static based protest and are supported by their parents. They work well with the police and deliver the protest as planned. They are not however able to control what happens outside of their influence or after their protest is finished.

I do have concerns which come from observing two previous youth led protests on College Green as the Police Silver Commander. Not only young people attend and I saw a whole range of adults, some from local protest groups but others who were unknown to the police. Many of the young people were not in the company of parents and I saw the unknown adults talking to them. I saw what I can only describe as coercion from adults to get the young people to march at the end without planning or the following of the safety rules. Without stewarding of any kind the young people occupied the road and walked amongst moving traffic at great danger to themselves. I also witnessed criminal acts of damage including people walking over the top of cars. I am of the opinion that this was encouraged by the adults.

I also received intelligence that young people were being invited to adult led protest activity.

I want to stress that I am not trying to prevent protest or to undermine the planning of the one scheduled for next Friday however I remain concerned for the safety of some of the young people who will attend.

I would therefore recommend that it can only be for parents to consent that any child under the age of 18 be present at a protest when they would otherwise be in school and it will be for the parent to determine how to keep their child safe in these circumstances.

I hope this information assists you.

Supt. Andy Bennett
Bristol Police Commander & Force Hate Crime Lead

Avon and Somerset Police
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