20 May 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Part of our WSFG ethos is to nurture confident, articulate students who care about the world we live in.  We encourage our students to express their ideas, their identity and to have a voice.  A number of students have recently become very concerned about events in Palestine and are passionate in expressing their views.  However, this has spilled out into some inappropriate behaviour, including shouting, painting faces, bringing in banners and pasting stickers on walls.  Some staff have been made to feel uncomfortable by students who have challenged them and have asked about their views and have wanted to discuss Palestine in lessons.  Some students have also questioned staff decisions, for example, to remove stickers and posters.

As parents, you know all too well how much learning time has been lost due to the pandemic and how important it is that we re-establish school routines and enable students to ‘catch up’.   You will also be aware that the Arab-Israeli conflict is hugely complex and highly political.  Students have found it difficult to understand why the school cannot endorse signs which say ‘Free Palestine’ because they are unaware of the political implications and the need for schools and teachers to be politically unbiased.

We want to be clear with students about what is and is not appropriate. SPLS, teachers and senior leaders have spent a lot of time talking to students in order to listen to their views but also to reinforce our expectations about behaviour in school.  Mr Shackson and Mr Morrow have delivered assemblies to explain the historical context in detail in order to ensure that students approach the subject as informed, critical thinkers.  We have also explained that some students may not share these views and may feel uncomfortable about this appearing to be the dominant narrative.

We have asked for student representatives from different year groups to meet with SPLs and the SLT to present their ideas to us, including their concerns and constructive plans for fund-raising.   We believe this process will help the students to experience how democracy works in action and will allow us to scrutinise their suggestions properly, with due diligence.   Students will need to understand that any action we take in the name of the school must be from a humanitarian and not a political perspective.

I am asking for your support as parents that you speak to your child, discuss their concerns and encourage them to take a balanced view of the issues so that they can form a well-rounded opinion.   I would also be grateful if you could reinforce that any protest should be conducted through the student voice meetings we have arranged and that any infringement of the school rules will be dealt with in the usual way.   We will not accept any students refusing to follow staff instructions.

We want all members of our school community to feel listened to and to feel safe in expressing their views in an appropriate way.   Thank you, in advance, for your support in reinforcing this message with your daughter.

Yours faithfully

Helen Marriott

Headteacher