

25 March 2004

Holmfirth High School
Heys Road
Thongsbridge
HD9 7SE

Dear Sir or Madam,

Re: Kirklees Healthy School Standard

Thank you for your letter of 10 March 2004. My comments are as follows :-

Whole School Awareness

I welcome your intention to involve the whole school community, may I suggest :-

- A single point of contact to address comments to (Healthy School Co-ordinator?)
- Dedicated e-mail address for such issues (published)
- Dedicated telephone extension (published) with answer machine for after hours to save using the main office.
- Regular updates in the newsletter

A Smoke-Free Environment

I absolutely agree that the whole of the school grounds should be a smoke free zone. Having recently implemented this policy where I work, I know it will be difficult for some staff - but it is also very difficult to promote a no-smoking policy generally if any personnel are exempt.

Healthy Eating

I have seen the new dining room and suggest that the biggest improvement is to the catering staff. Giving kids a choice is one thing, allowing them to buy sweets, crisps, burgers and fizzy drinks instead of proper food is not a good move. Some kids will always choose a healthy balance, some will stray occasionally, and some will abuse the freedom every chance they get. This gives parents and teachers no control, other than to take them off school meals altogether. The system of a "printout" to indicate what your child has been eating has proved to be very inaccurate and is easily bypassed by any child due to them using each others cards.

I do not believe that all children are ready for a move from total control at junior school to complete freedom at the same age. Flexibility is something that can be introduced gradually at the same time as they are receiving information in classes.

My suggestion is to only allow the dinner cards to buy a school meal and other healthy choices (fruit etc). If parents allow their children to have extras like sweets

then they can give them cash and the children can choose where and when to get it from (to/from school included of course). This will help to reduce the substitution of junk for food.

I have recently spoken to many other people who share this view, some of the “old ways” still have some value. We will see how far Mr Jon Owen Jones MP manages to push his bill to ban junk food from vending machines. I realise that HHS does not have vending machines, you don't need them as you sell it all over the counter!

I also realise that the catering has been outsourced – time for a re-think there and an amended contract. I know of one school where a teacher took direct action to remove all the junk food from the (outsourced) catering staff, if they haven't got it on the counter they can't sell it. You may be surprised at the result. Kids will still buy things to eat and will still spend all the money on their card each week, thus not impacting on the catering service requirement to recover costs in a commercial way.

Safe, Clean and Stimulating Environment

I agree with all your points, dogs should not be allowed on the grounds. Monitoring and enforcing it is another matter of course. What about improved signage and fines for a start ?

Physical Education and Activity

Of course you should encourage more kids to walk to school. What do they do when they get there with wet clothes/footwear ? This is an area that needs some development. I understand that at the moment they have to carry all their kit around all day as there are no cloakrooms and not enough lockers, which in turn are not secure. This is not an ideal situation. I know that the lockers are being improved throughout the school as part of the general renovation, but this does not really address my point as they are generally far too small, and are not intended for coats.

I trust the school is also applying pressure at every opportunity to have the long awaited pedestrian crossing installed at the crossroads opposite the Royal Oak at the bottom of Thong Lane. The recent speed reductions along the main road may help a little, but this is generally a very busy place at school crossing times and the possibility of an accident there seems very real.

Parents who drive their children to/from school every day are increasing the risk of those who walk and I would welcome any initiatives to highlight this issue and to explore ways to reduce car journeys.

Yours faithfully,

rg@nthong.freeseve.co.uk