

25 February 2020

Dear parents and carers,

Re: Bristol Climate Strike, 28th February 2020

As you may be aware, there is another planned climate strike at 11am on 28th February, this coming Friday. It is likely that Greta Thunberg will attend the event in order to speak, which means that the event will have an even higher profile and therefore be of a larger scale than in previous instances. I wanted to reiterate to you our Academy's position on the climate strikes and to offer you some of the insights afforded to me as Principal, in order that you can make decisions with your child that prioritise their safety and well-being, should you wish for them to be involved. As with previous events:

- Any student wishing to attend a climate strike (or any other action/event out of school) should have written consent from a parent to do so.
- The academy will choose to allow students to leave with this permission, but will not count this as attendance at school (i.e. students will have this as an absence). It is important for students to learn that such action does come at a cost – in this case missing out on learning and perhaps on rewards associated with attendance – and that as such they, and their families, must consider this to be a serious and significant issue.

The presence of Greta Thunberg at Friday's protest is likely to prompt some students and families to consider attending this event when they may not have attended others. With this in mind, it may be useful for families to consider for themselves the following matters, and to consider two pieces of communication – Appendices 1 & 2. The first is letter from Supt Andy Bennett of Avon and Somerset Police - this was sent to school leaders following a previous climate strike. The second is a message to schools from Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate.

It is important to note that for schools to authorise an absence for a child to attend the event would require schools to take a level of responsibility for student safety at such an event that is beyond their capability, given the nature of a large-scale protest event. Hence absence will not be authorised. For parents and carers, who take responsibility for their child's safety during an unauthorised absence, the following questions may aid preparation:

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Questions for parents and carers to consider

1. Is your child mature and responsible enough to manage attendance at the event, including a range of possible unforeseen circumstances? How might you help them to understand the potential risks and opportunities through thorough discussion in advance of the event?
2. How will your child make decisions on the day about who to trust and whose advice to take?
3. How will your child remain in contact with you and with others? What is the back up plan should this communication method fail? In the advent of a loss of technology, does your child have a sound and safe plan?
4. How will your child travel to and from the event? Do they know how to manage in the event that the travel infrastructure fails or changes? Do they and you have a back up plan?
5. How will your child engage with social media? Are they able to ensure they are safe online as well as in person?
6. Will you or another responsible adult accompany your child in order to facilitate their safe navigation of the event?

As an academy, we are of course mindful of the current climate change debate and that it is mostly a live and healthy topic of conversation amongst our student body. We would therefore encourage all families to promote positive discussion and debate. We will continue also to adopt locally-led appropriate initiatives (assemblies, projects, group activities, etc) which ensure that pupils are aware of the international focus on this agenda and help to inform and educate our pupils on climate change and the environment.

Please be assured that our first priority for your child is that they remain safe – it is in this spirit that I have chosen to share with you the two communications below, and to offer some thinking and discussion points for you and your child ahead of Friday, in order to support your decision making.

Yours sincerely,

Lis Jolley
Principal

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Appendix 1

Police Letter to school leaders following a previous climate strike

Dear Head teachers,

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.

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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

Appendix 2

Message to Headteachers from Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate

On Friday the 28th of February (at 11:00) there will a Climate Strike in the centre of Bristol and we implore you to not punish your students for attending this and to grant them an authorised absence. Whilst we know that another strike did take place quite recently, this particular protest is a special one; two-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee Greta Thunberg will be in attendance and giving a speech. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for your students to see this incredible, influential youth activist in person.

Thank you for your understanding,
Bristol Youth Strike 4 Climate

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