



South Dartmoor Community College

Executive Head teacher | Mrs J Veal

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10 January 2023

Emailed

Dear Parent / Carer

I am writing following the assemblies I have just held with all students in Years 7 to 11, and I shall be speaking to the sixth form students tomorrow morning. I felt the need to get all students together to talk about the recent fire bells that have been set off intentionally and the position that puts us in.

Every time the fire alarm goes off, it is potentially a question of life and death. Every occurrence is taken seriously; staff identify the area in which there may be a potential fire, registers are printed, buildings are searched and cleared, systems are put in place to call the fire brigade etc. Fortunately, most fire alarms are a false alarm but we are all safe and secure knowing there is a good system that works to alert us all, as early as possible, of the potential risks so positive action can be taken. Unfortunately, with every false alarm, the psychology of it being a real event is diminished (rather like the boy who cried wolf) and our safety is jeopardised. Therefore, we take every intentional raising of the alarm under false pretenses extremely seriously.

In the Autumn, I wrote to parents and carers about vaping that was happening in the toilets on occasions and triggering the fire sensors. We were able to put in place measures to curb this practice and by and large this situation has improved. However, shortly before Christmas, a couple of students intentionally set off the fire bells by punching the sensors to activate them. When we were able to identify those who had done this, via CCTV footage or witnesses, these students were dealt with in the most severe terms.

As we returned from holidays, I had hoped that the handful of students, who were engaging in this dangerous and disruptive behaviour, had changed and learnt that this cannot and will not be tolerated. Unfortunately this seems not to be the case as, yesterday, on two occasions, a number of fire sensors were hit with the intention of setting off the alarms. We managed to determine that there was no fire and disable the system on one of these occasions but not on the other, and this resulted in a whole school evacuation. We have managed to determine that this was one single individual, who set it off both times. The student is now having conversations about their future at our school.

Rightly, students are becoming increasingly irritated at the amount of learning time lost. The disruption to lessons is not acceptable but is equally unavoidable as soon as the alarm is triggered. Yesterday it was a sunny day, but we have been out in all manner of weather and, not only does this understandably irritate students further, it also compromises their well-being, if they are stood outside unnecessarily in the cold, wind and rain.

Most importantly this compromises our safety as, with each false alarm, it makes it harder to treat the next alarm as real. We simply cannot continue in this way; the vast majority of students at South Dartmoor know this and want to be in lessons learning. It is my understanding that if this were to happen in a public building such as a shopping centre, the police would be called and it would be logged as a criminal offense.

Therefore, I have spoken to all students today to assure them that I do not and will not tolerate anyone who compromises our safety and disrupts learning. Any student deliberately setting off the fire alarm will face Permanent Exclusion and Police prosecution. I have asked the students to work together as a community to stop this practice. This includes helping us ascertain who the individuals are who behave like this and refraining from encouraging others to do it.

Cont/d ...

I am hopeful that this will now stop, that we can be assured of our safety and enjoy uninterrupted learning. Kindly discuss this with your child if the opportunity arises. Mostly students know that it is very wrong, but it never harms to have reinforcement of a key message such as this.

Many thanks for your support.



Jen Veal
Executive Head teacher - South Dartmoor Community College

