



Dear Parents / Carers

I hope that this letter finds you and your family well, and that your child has enjoyed their start to the new academic year. It's so nice to be back in a school without so many of the tight restrictions that were placed on us because of the pandemic, and - as a result - to be able to restart some of the opportunities that were put on hold.

Quick read

If you're looking for a quick summary of what this letter is about, here's a list of the key points.

- After a positive start last year, the LIFE curriculum is growing and looks set to be even better and bigger than before.
- The focus of LIFE this year is on **positivity** and **opportunity**.
- There are going to be lots of new clubs this academic year. Look out for more information over the next couple of weeks.
- We have lots of competitions planned throughout the year: in school, local and national ones.
- We are introducing LIFE ambition points which will be awarded to students who go out of their way to make other people's lives brighter, who take part in clubs and competitions, and who generally contribute in a positive way to school life.
- Students will be able to use a 'Thank someone' button on the student dashboard to thank a member of staff or a student who has gone out of their way to support them.
- We are supporting all of our students with developing their speaking and listening skills through LIFE lessons, and also through new LIFE TALK lessons in year 7.
- We want to hear from you about anything that your child does out of school that deserves recognition - let us know via email to their tutor, head of year, or straight to me at l.fox@stokesleyschool.org.

Longer read

If you're wanting to know more about each (or some) of the bullet points above, this section of the letter goes into more detail.

You will be aware that last year we introduced our new LIFE curriculum into tutor time, with 20 minute discussion sessions based around topics on the statutory RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) framework and a range of other topics which help to prepare our students for life. We have been so impressed with the way in which our students have engaged with these lessons and, as such, are able to build on the foundations this year to make our LIFE offer even bigger and better.





The focus of LIFE this year is on **positivity** and **opportunity**. We want our students to seek out every opportunity to get involved in school life both inside and outside the classroom. We want to continue to build the sense of our school community and to help our students to look out for themselves and one another through the things that they do and say.

This letter outlines some of the changes that we're making, and explains how both you and your child can get involved with what LIFE has to offer.

LIFE outside lessons: clubs, competitions and recognition

Clubs

We recognise the vital role that extra curricular activities play in allowing students to gain experience and skills in areas not typically part of our everyday curriculum and know too that they can be a great place for students to meet new like-minded people and make new friends. One of the effects of the pandemic was that we were unable to run any clubs in school. Now that many of the restrictions have been lifted, we're able to offer a bigger and broader range of extra-curricular activities than ever before and can't wait to get our students involved.

In the next couple of weeks you'll receive our brochure of extra-curricular activities. Students will be talked through this in tutor time and then you'll be able to look together at home and sign your child up for whatever clubs they would like to attend. You'll see from the brochure that we have tried to provide a wide variety of activities across the school, both supporting our existing curriculum by offering academic support for students preparing for exams and also giving a chance for other talents to shine. We have a wide ranging offer of sporting activities for all year groups, as well as more artistic and creative activities in art or drama. We're keen to match what we offer to what students want to do, so if there is something your child would like to get involved in that isn't currently offered, please let us know and we'll see what we can do

Competitions

As well as widening our offer of extra-curricular activities, we're also excited to let you know that we have lots of competitions planned for over the course of the academic year. Some of these competitions will be run in house and some will allow students to enter into local or national competitions. They'll cover a range of topics - academic and non-academic - and our hope is that, at some point in the year, there's something that appeals to all of our students in one way or another. If you or your child spots or hears about a local or national competition that we don't know about, please let us know via the life@stokesleyschool.org email address, and we'll do our best to run with it in our school too!





Recognition

In addition to the Ambition Points that are already given out in school for outstanding classroom contributions, this academic year we are also introducing LIFE ambition points. These ambition points are there to recognise the things that so many of our students do to make the days of other people brighter; they are also to recognise commitment to clubs and contributions to competitions; additionally, they will be used to thank students who are polite, kind and who seek to do good on a daily basis. With our focus on positivity, we hope that these LIFE ambition points help students to see that their contributions to our school are recognised, appreciated and celebrated.

We are also introducing a button on the student dashboard with the simple title 'Thank Someone'. This button is there for students to use when someone, whether this be another student or a member of staff, has gone out of their way to help or to be kind to them. They'll fill in a quick google form and then the person that they're thanking will receive a handwritten LIFE postcard thanking them for what they did. We know as adults, don't we, the good feelings that come with doing nice for someone else and hope that the introduction of this button, alongside other things that we do such as our 'apple for the teacher' postcards, help our students to experience these feelings too.

We'd love for you to let us know - as parents and carers - of anything that your child does outside of school that you think deserves recognition. We know that so many of our young people are involved in clubs, organisations and activities outside of school and would love to be able to share in their successes. If you let us know what they've achieved, we can celebrate with them too. An email to their tutor, to their head of year, or to l.fox@stokesleyschool.org would be great! The more we know about our students, the more we can support them.

LIFE inside lessons: oracy and LIFE talk lessons

Oracy

One of the biggest barriers to students getting on in life is a lack of eloquence. We are not willing for this to be the case for any student who leaves Stokesley school.

Oracy is defined as 'the skills needed for effective speaking and listening' which, we're sure you will agree, are essential for a successful adult life. Our LIFE lessons encourage students to engage in paired and group discussions with the students in their tutor group. A year of form tutors facilitating these lessons has confirmed what we thought: these skills come more naturally to some of our students than others. We want to use these lessons, then, to help students develop these skills to use both in and out of the classroom. One of the tools that we are introducing into LIFE lessons is the discussion builder, a grid designed to support students to build on the points that other students have made. You can see a copy of this grid [here](#). It might be that it's also useful at home: the more we can work together, the better.





As well as encouraging students to use the discussion builder, we will also be introducing an oracy focus of the half term which is promoted by all staff across the school. For the first two half terms the oracy challenges are, respectively, speaking in full sentences rather than one or two word responses and avoiding using 'like'. Again, if these are things that you're able to encourage at home then your child will be developing this life skill both in and out of school and heightening the chances of them sticking as habits for good!

LIFE talk lessons

We're excited to announce that we're introducing new once fortnightly curriculum for our year 7 cohort: LIFE talk lessons. The purpose of LIFE talk lessons is to equip year 7 students with the skills that they need to be confident, fluent speakers about a range of topics across a range of contexts. If we can teach our students to articulate their ideas and engage with others through spoken language then we are empowering them to better understand themselves, others and the world around them. The curriculum will culminate in a performance evening at the end of the year, where you will be invited to see your child - and others - deliver a recital of a poem to a live audience; an event that we hope that they will remember into their adult lives.

The LIFE bulletin

Last year we introduced our LIFE bulletin, a document that's shared weekly with students via the student dashboard which contains messages from their Head of Year, facts, good news stories, information about competitions, jokes, words of the week, careers information, safeguarding and wellbeing updates and more. We will be continuing to produce the bulletin on a weekly basis into this academic year as a place where students can access up-to-date information and find out what's going on in their school and the wider world. The bulletin is also accessible via the school website under News > LIFE for you to access as parents/carers. For quick access to the welcome back bulletin for this week, click [here](#).

And finally...

Our school is very much a community and you, as parents and carers, have a hugely significant and vital role in that community. If there is anything that you would like to ensure that we cover in our LIFE curriculum, or anything at all that you would like to discuss in terms of the personal development of the young people in our care, please don't hesitate to be in touch.

Yours faithfully

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