

Dear Parent/ Guardian

In September 2010 we are planning on changing the way we organise our support for students and introducing **Vertical Tutoring** and I would like to take this opportunity to share our proposals with you.

What is Vertical Tutoring?

Vertical Tutoring is a way of organising tutor groups so that they include a range of ages, making them more like a family. Evidence from schools across the country suggests that it is a good way to support learning and raise achievement. It also creates a stronger sense of belonging as students look to older – and younger – members of their form for support and advice.

The staff at Sidney Stringer have been actively researching and planning for Vertical Tutoring for some time now. We have visited other schools and academies that have introduced it, invited staff and students that have been involved in it to talk to us and spoken to a number of consultants. Sponsors and staff are now convinced that this is the way we now want to support our young people.

Why introduce it?

- In deciding to develop Vertical Tutoring Sidney Stringer Academy is looking ahead. Whatever the future holds for education, we all agree that equipping students with transferable skills and attributes will be essential for the world of work in years to come. The future will not be about knowledge alone but about the ability to be reflective, resilient and adaptable, working in many different roles, getting on with and working alongside a range of people of different ages and backgrounds. Vertical Tutoring will help Sidney Stringer Academy ensure that students gain this valuable experience throughout their school life.
- Vertical Tutoring helps to strengthen belonging. It demonstrates to students the ways in which they belong to groups that are about much more than simply their age. Students will still belong to a year group and have most of their lessons with students their own age, but they will also see that they belong to the broader community of their tutor group, made up of a range of ages, to the community of their House and to the school community as a whole.
- Learning is the key to future success. But learning is not just about subject knowledge, it is about the ways in which individual's learn best and about how best to work and learn with and through others. Vertical Tutoring enables greater opportunities to learn from others. In each tutor group there will be students who have been through what another is going through, who will be able to offer advice about options choices or difficulties with a particular subject.
- Vertical Tutoring is about aspiration and inspiration. It enables students to see what others have achieved close up, and to learn from them. Through Vertical Tutoring and the House system students will be encouraged to do their best, to take part and to make the most of the opportunities available to them.

Many other schools and Academies have introduced it. This is what they have to say...

“We had lots of anxieties expressed to us, from parents, but most notably from children about how it would be the end of civilisation as we know it if we suddenly mixed children together, that there’d be fears of bullying from the older pupils towards the younger pupils and so on... We discovered very quickly from the time we started this that we had the older students supporting the younger children with reading, with homework, with options and it developed this culture of support which we’d never had before.”

Headteacher, Westlands School, Kent (Teachers TV)

“To our intense relief, almost no students wanted to return to horizontal groups. Among the reasons that they cited for preferring the new system were:

- *more friends in other year groups*
- *a reduction in bullying*
- *a greater sense of house identity*
- *The opportunity for younger students to be helped by older students (for example, when choosing options).”*

Headteacher, Lawrence Sheriff School, Rugby

What we know

Where other schools and academies have introduced it this is what they have found:

- Vertical Tutoring changes the atmosphere in schools. It fosters a greater sense of belonging and community. It creates opportunities for students to support and learn from each other.
- Vertical Tutoring reduces instances of bullying. Some people are concerned that placing younger students with older ones leads them into bad ways. But the evidence from schools that have VT is that, in fact, it does the opposite: it helps build positive relationships and positive role models. Evidence certainly suggests that it reduces the 'in year' bullying that often occurs with students of the same age.
- Vertical Tutoring enables schools to focus on the individual needs of students. It support academic and peer mentoring, meaning students get better individual attention. With fewer students of a particular year group, tutors can focus on their needs at key times.
- Vertical Tutoring provides opportunities for students to develop their own skills. Vertical tutor groups enable older and younger students to work together. This means, for example, that older students can help younger ones with their reading.
- Vertical Tutoring is least welcomed by students. Just about every school that has introduced it has found that students do not like the idea at first. They believe they are losing out on time to be with their friends. However, tutor time is approximately 6% of the school day, compared to lunch and break which are 18%. Students will still be taught with their peers and have breaks and lunchtime together. What Vertical Tutoring does is make better use of the tutor time in school so that it is focused on support for students.
- Once students have experienced Vertical Tutoring, few want to go back to the old way of organising school.

How will we organise it?

- Vertical Tutoring will mean that each student in school will be in a tutor group of 20 or 21 students. Each tutor group will be made up of students from each year group (approximately 4 x Y7, 4 x Y8, 4 x Y9, 4 x Y10, 4 x Y11,)
- Sixth form students will not be part of these tutor groups and will remain as a discrete year group. They will however be attached to houses and support as much as possible.
- The tutor groups will belong to one of the five Houses. Each House will have 11 tutor groups.
- This term tutors will identify two students from their group that they think should remain together.
- By April Miss Turpin will have constructed tutor groups based on staff views and school data. The aim will be to ensure an even spread of abilities, skills and ages across the tutor groups. We will endeavor to ensure that each student is with at least one friend of their choice.
- Students will be informed of their new tutor groups in May.
- The new tutor groups will have the opportunity to meet before the end of term so that tutors and students can get to know each other.

What next?

We hope that the information we have provided helps you to understand not only our reasons for moving to Vertical Tutoring but also the benefits that it offers for all our students in the Academy.

If you have any questions or comments about these proposals then please E mail either Miss Turpin or myself and we will get back to you.

wtomes.staff@sidneystringer.coventry.sch.uk

cturpin.staff@sidneystringer.coventry.sch.uk

There will be opportunities to speak to key staff about Vertical Tutoring at Academy events over the coming months. We are also holding a parents reference group meeting on **Wednesday February 10th at 6pm** where this will be the main item.

If you would like to attend you are very welcome.

In this way we can work now to make Vertical Tutoring at Sidney Stringer the best experience for our students.

Yours sincerely



Wendy Tomes
Principal Designate