



ST. AIDAN'S

CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

17th July 2024

Dear Parents/Carers,

We have received several emails providing feedback about the trips offer published last week and the additional opportunity for the current year 9 students to go to the Ardeche next year. We are sorry that we are unable to respond individually to all correspondence.

The feedback has been valuable, and whilst we recognised that many parents and carers have written in to express their gratitude for the clarity and continued offer, we appreciate that some of the decisions have caused concern and disappointment amongst others. We are aware that our school trips are an important aspect of school life at St. Aidan's and the feedback received over the past week has underlined the importance of these life opportunities for our students.

The reality of taking a year group away has a significant impact on the school in many ways and over the past few years we have had to evaluate this impact. We understand that St. Aidan's has been one of the very few schools who have continued to offer whole year group trips and have had to make decisions about sustainability. In particular, we have considered trip leadership expertise and staff attendance on trips with the additional workload involved for teachers. We are also mindful about the quality of education for those left behind or who are losing their specialist teachers. The cost of lesson cover is an increased pressure for schools as well as the increased bureaucracy around safeguarding, medication for students whilst on trips, accountability, and legislation for schools. Added to this, schools are required to justify their intent and the educational value of all trips and visits and are responsible for the administration costs, and the increased transport and accommodation costs since Covid. With these issues to confront, regrettably, we have to seriously consider all these parameters in order to justifiably continue to run such an enormous extracurricular offer.

The decision to discontinue the Ardeche trip for year 11 was a very difficult one. The trip has been running at the school for over 40 years and I have been involved in both leading and administering the trip for 30 of those years. Last year when we re-introduced the trip to run with the company Acorn for the first time after Covid, it was difficult to find staff to attend the trip and even more difficult to find experienced trip leaders for the four coaches. All trips and visits taken outside the school working day are done so voluntarily by staff. Many staff have dependents, such as young children or older relatives, and this has meant that we do not have the numbers of staff who are able to volunteer to accompany all the trips we would like to offer. Sadly, there are tight rules that govern schools about teachers not being

Headteacher: Mrs S Dover

allowed to be paid for these extra hours of responsibility and there have been occasions this year when trips have not been fully staffed right up until the day before we have been due to leave. If staff have to pull out for personal reasons, we have really struggled to find a late replacement and recently, we have had to ask staff who had key exam groups to attend at the last minute which impacts on the education of students back in school. As trips must be booked up to two years in advance, it was decided last year that 2024 would be the final year that we would take year 11 on the Ardeche trip along with some other trips. We apologise that this was not communicated with parents or students earlier and acknowledge that this would have been helpful for all to know at the time the decision was made.

When we analysed the opportunities that each year group has had to go on trips, the current year 9 is the year group that has missed out the most and at late notice we managed to secure a week in the Ardeche for next year. We don't wish for this correspondence to come across as defensive in anyway as there is no doubt that everyone here at St Aidan's wishes the educational system had not changed so much in recent years; we are seeking your understanding as parents and carers as we negotiate the changing educational climate to ensure we find the balance needed to continue to provide a high quality education, and the experience of life in all its fullness, for each and every one of our students.

Despite the difficulties around trip organisation and legislation, we hear how saddened many students and parents are about discontinuing the Ardeche trip at the end of year 11 and we are therefore looking into whether we can re-book a week for summer 2025. We ask for your patience as we try to work through this and also ask for the negativity from some parents and carers that has been put on social media to stop, as this is hurtful to the many staff who voluntarily provide these opportunities.

We will contact all year 10 parents and carers again as soon as we can confirm the outcome of our discussions with the travel companies.
Thank you for your understanding and once again, we apologise that we have been unable to respond individually to correspondence.

Yours faithfully,

Mr D Holdsworth
Assistant Headteacher

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