

An Open Letter to our community,

Behaviour and safety outside of school

The improving weather is always a natural sign of hope and a moment for optimism. There is no doubt that this generation of young people will need those optimistic moments even more because of the reduced experiences and restrictions that they have followed over the last two years. In Harborough, we are fortunate to live together in a strong community and to benefit from the beautiful parks, the features of our local town and the many surrounding villages. Our children also benefit from growing up in an environment where they can develop lifelong friendships and feel a sense of place in their community. It is a great place to grow up.

However, we need to be much more honest about the risks in our community and cultural norms that place children at risk. We all know that mental health concerns are more prevalent now than they were before the pandemic and that more teenagers have been impacted and that means that this is even more critical.

What are the concerns?

Last year, the regular gatherings in Warwick Park (Kibworth) and Little Bowden Park (Harborough) amongst others, generated a number of serious safety concerns and included investigations by Leicestershire police. These investigations raised very serious safety concerns due to the behaviour in local parks, including:

- Underage drinking, vaping, smoking, and children using cannabis
- Possession and dealing of cannabis
- Child Sexual Exploitation
- Violence including serious assault
- Anti-social behaviour including vandalism
- Bullying via social media

To be clear, this does not refer to students of any school specifically. These concerns exist in the community.

What are schools doing about it?

Schools continue to educate and safeguard children by teaching them about personal safety and risk through the PSHE curriculum and through events such as the Harborough District Council Community Safety Roadshow held at Robert Smyth Academy. We believe that schools need to have strong and supportive relationships with local agencies to provide students with access to support beyond school.

What can our community do?

Parents can do three simple things to promote the safety of their children:

1. **Talk to your child about these issues** in a way that you feel to be appropriate, based on their age
2. **Ask for help if you are not sure how to approach this topic.** There is excellent support available for parents from organisations such as [Mind](#). This [webpage](#) provides good examples of ways to approach difficult conversations with teenagers and further links to other resources that will help parents
3. **Contact your child's school.** If you have safety concerns for your child, your school will want to help

We want to reassure you that we continue to see the best in teenagers and young people. We know that they are talented, articulate, creative, industrious, and full of life. We love working with them. This letter reflects our shared commitment to do more and to say more to keep them all safe.

Yours sincerely,



D Cleary



**Robert Smyth
Academy**

This letter is endorsed and supported by:

Neil O'Brien

Member of Parliament for Harborough, Oadby, and Wigston



Neil O'Brien (Member of Parliament for Harborough, Oadby and Wigston)

Learn Academies Trust

Welland Park Academy

Kibworth Mead Academy

Harborough District Council

Leicestershire Police

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