

10th June 2024

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing because a number of you have written in to say how disappointed you are with the Academy's decision to change Year 6 camp in 2025.

I will set out in detail the full reasoning behind the changes below. I am really sorry that you feel this way. We took a long time making sure that the alternative was, though two less nights, a fantastic one.

The following reasons were the main considerations we had in making the change:

1. We strive to be a fully inclusive school and over the past few years we have seen challenges with Okehampton which has meant that far too many children have missed out on the camp experience:
 - No children from our Specialist Provision have been able to go to Okehampton - at Charterhouse we will be able to transport children in daily. This will allow us to meet the needs of all our children.
 - More and more families tell us that they find the cost of Okehampton really challenging. We know that there would be a further rise on last year's costs, especially around transport, which will only add to this big commitment. What was important to us is that we retained 3 full days of activities. We lose a day of activities at Okehampton due to travelling.
 - We have found that more and more children are suffering anxiety around the Camp experience (especially during the night time). Okehampton is on the edge of Dartmoor and very tricky to find and has no direct SAT NAV. Having to call either parents, or other staff, to support in the middle of the night has been very stressful for everyone involved.
2. Camp only exists on staff good will. As Head Teacher I need everyone to want to go. There is no overtime or time off in lieu. The week is one of the most intensive experiences you can have in education and it has got harder and harder over the years. Staff come away utterly drained. You are fully in charge and responsible for a huge group of children, more and more complex medical, dietary and health needs, mental health concerns and other demands. We have found that the strain on staff wellbeing, who are away from their own families, is massive and we need to factor this in to the camp experience. If staff do not want to go, then there will be no camp. Having a camp in closer proximity means we have many more options to replace or add extra staff if required. This includes allowing Senior Leaders to take part where at the moment the demands at Brookside often take this option away. The idea being that we can pop down in the evening adding to the shared experience alongside staff.

3. In recent years with national health cuts we have had to take an additional member of staff and their car as nearby emergency health care facilities are working reduced hours and any out of hours emergency requires a trip to Exeter, which is an hour away from camp and takes two staff away from the main group.
4. Some emails said we should have gone out to parents about the decision. I am sorry, but this was very much a decision that needed to be made by the Academy.
5. Charterhouse comes highly recommended. Former Year 6 Teacher, Sian Rapsey, who ran Okehampton at Brookside for well over a decade and Melissa Gibbons (another former staff member familiar with Okehampton) have both said it was the best camp experience they have had with their new schools.

Once again, we apologise to those of you who wrote in with concerns about our decision and we thank others for the positive and understanding emails.

Ultimately, we had the very best interests of our whole school community in mind when it came to making this decision, thank you for your continued support and understanding, I know many of you were voicing questions that I hope I have now answered.

Yours sincerely,

Brian Walton and the Brookside Team