

12 July 2012

Queen Margaret's

Escrick Park • York

Mrs V Cumberland,  
Clerk to Escrick Parish Council  
8 The Glade  
Escrick  
York  
YO19 6JH

Dear Mrs Cumberland,

Thank you for your letter of 4 July, which arrived here just after the end of term. The improvements to the Park Gates and security in and around Queen Margaret's is a topic that I had intended should be put on the agenda for the next meeting of the Escrick Liaison Committee (ELC) in September. This I will still do, but I set out below answers to your queries in the context of our plans.

I would like to start by saying how important I believe the relationship between the school and village to be. With this firmly in mind, I have asked my wife, Rebecca Silverwood to continue the work started by Stuart Nettleship, who retires this summer, and host meetings of the ELC each term in school, at which matters of mutual concern and benefit may be discussed.

The planning application in relation to Park Gates is for work that extends beyond the re-siting of the gates to their original position. The years have not been kind to the gates and they are now rather battered and affected by rust, so it is our plan that, before being replaced in their original position, they will be completely restored by a local craftsman. That is something about which I hope everyone will approve.

However, the plans also provide that the gates will be made capable of being locked (as they originally were). It is our intention, once that work has been done, that it will no longer be possible for members of the general public to obtain access to the School grounds via these gates. I must explain the reasons behind this. In September 2011 HM Government brought into force revised National Minimum Standards to safeguard and promote the welfare of children for whom accommodation is provided by boarding schools. Those standards are stated to be minimum standards below which no school is expected to fall. We anticipate that, following our recent very successful whole school inspection, which was overseen by Ofsted, we will shortly face a detailed intermediate inspection by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (to whom this task has been delegated) during which the School will be tested on its compliance with the new standards and legislation. Failure to meet those standards would have grave consequences for the school concerned.

Standard 5.5 of the national Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools states that:

*"Boarding accommodation is reserved for the use of those children designated to use it, and is protected from access by unauthorised persons. Any use of school facilities by individuals or groups does not allow members of the public (including members of organised groups using school facilities) substantial and unsupervised access to children or to boarding accommodation while occupied by children"*

We are also required to ensure that any use of surveillance equipment (e.g. CCTV cameras) or patrolling of school buildings or grounds for security purposes does not intrude unreasonably on children's privacy.

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As things stand we would, self-evidently, be deemed not to have met standard 5.5 as we have no effective means of regulating who comes onto the School through Park Gates.

Our concerns have been reinforced by a number of incidents in the recent past. On one occasion a group of youths came into the School through Park Gates late one evening and threw eggs at boarding house windows; on another occasion, very recently, youths came onto School premises via Park Gates in the early hours of the morning and were abusive to our security guard before some of them urinated against the wall of a boarding house, underneath a window. Unhappily the CCTV footage has not helped to identify the culprits. Earlier this term, I had to turn back a group of young men who were using the School grounds as a short cut to get from Main Street to the other side of the School grounds late at night. Even disregarding these incidents, the Governors have been advised that they are unable to permit the present, comparatively unrestricted, access to the school premises to continue given the standards that we must meet and we have been tasked with improving security arrangements at school.

In case it helps, I attach an account of the experience of a Cumbrian Primary School during its inspection; we can only imagine how much more seriously the Inspectors will view the situation when teenage girls have their home here.

I know that this will cause some unhappiness among our neighbours, whose friendship and support we value. Those wishing to get to land on the other side of the school for recreation or dog walking will, I am afraid, in the future have to use the permissive footpath created by Escrick Park Estate through Gashouse Wood for that purpose.

We do however wish to continue our partnerships with the local community, including the Parish Church, Primary School, swimming club and members of the riding stables and will discuss how residents using our facilities may obtain access through Park Gates, which will almost certainly have to be supervised.

The School's Clerk designate and Director of Administration and Compliance, Tom King, is dealing with this matter on behalf of the school and the Governors. He is also in communication with Escrick Park Estate. If it would help for him to meet with local residents or if you require any further information, please contact him here at school. I would also be very happy to meet with members of the Parish Council to discuss this matter further, if that is appropriate.

I hope that we can work together to maintain our continued partnerships within the framework we are required to operate as a boarding school.

Yours sincerely,



**Dr Paul Silverwood**  
**Headmaster**

Enc

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