



## FAQs on Vertical Tutor Groups (VTG)

### What is Vertical Tutoring?

Tutor groups are organised into groups of students of different ages – Year 7 up to Year 11.

### Is this a new idea?

No. Vertical tutoring is already established in schools nationwide. The Senior Leadership Team and Redhill Academy Trust believe there are significant advantages to it.

### What are the advantages?

- Smaller tutor group sizes, resulting in improved professional relationships and support
- Improved peer mentoring as older students will talk to younger students about things such as option choices, preparing for exams and post 16 choices
- An outstanding community atmosphere within the school where everyone is approachable and mutually respectful
- Any perceived obstacles regarding interacting between students of different ages will be removed
- Smaller year group clusters in each tutor group enabling tutors and co-tutors to mentor students more effectively throughout their educational journey
- Smaller number of KS4 students in each tutor groups will allow tutors to provide improved levels of support during their GCSE examination years
- Improved employability skills as age ranges within the world of work are mixed
- Students are provided with better leadership opportunities (for example buddy reading)

### Will vertical tutoring split up existing friendships?

Tutor time only accounts for about 7% of the total school day. Students will see other friends in many of their lessons and during break and lunch times.

In compiling the new tutor groups, students' personalities, interests, abilities and friendships will be considered in order to create balanced groups and avoid anyone being isolated.

### **What does this mean for assemblies?**

Heads of House will run vertical assemblies on a weekly basis. There will be occasions when year groups may need to come together for specific events or information sharing, for example, Y9 Options Launch, Y10 Work Experience Launch, Post-16 HE events.

### **Will younger students be negatively influenced by older students?**

Research and feedback from other schools suggests that the opposite is true. Feedback suggests that an “in-group loyalty” develops as students get to know each other and grow in confidence. Form Tutors will have responsibility, supported by the Head of House and Pastoral Support Assistants, for making sure any unacceptable behaviour is addressed and a strong tutor group ‘bond’ is maintained.

### **How many students will be in a tutor group?**

Initial plans are for each House to have 10 tutor groups and each tutor group to have around 20 students made up of clusters of approximately 4 students from each age group. Students will usually stay in the same tutor group for their whole school career to the end of Y11. Tutor groups will also have co-tutors (teaching and non-teaching staff) to provide our students with increased levels of support.

### **How will tutor time be organised?**

This is something that the Heads of House and Senior Leadership Team will work on together once appointments have been made to the Head of House roles, however, it is likely that each week will include:

- Expectations check (uniform/planner/attendance)
- Reading activities
- Personal development activities
- Weekly House assembly

Every half-term there will be a horizontal year group assembly scheduled where the Senior Leadership Team and other school leaders will address students in year groups.

### **What are the benefits to this system?**

The VTG structure enables staff to get to know students better, to recognise their achievements and address their concerns more effectively. Tutors can focus on small clusters of students as they approach significant points in their school life, for example, when Y9 students are making option choices the tutor will only have to offer guidance to 4 students instead of 28.

### **How will students of different ages work together and support each other?**

In VTG's, students can learn a lot from each other. When Y6 students start their transition to the school they will meet and get to know older students which will reduce some of the anxiety they may have about being the youngest in the school again. When students arrive at their options at the end of KS3, older students can share their perspective on subjects and choices in an informal, supportive way. During tutor time discussions about key issues and current affairs, students will learn to listen,

respect and learn from the views of other students. *Very rarely in the rest of our lives do we operate only with people of the same age as ourselves, so VTG's can be a good preparation for life beyond school.*

### **What other benefits are there to the school community?**

The structure will offer further opportunities to extend House competitions in a range of activities. Recognition and sanctions will operate through the Houses, fostering a sense of loyalty and responsibility to others in the House. In this way we hope that Vertical Tutoring will develop positive values and a stronger community ethos.

### **What role will students have in implementing this?**

The Student Council will be involved in choosing the House names, in designing the re-vamped ties and in developing their House identity/motto. Our students will be able to offer ideas for the Inter-House competitions.

### **Who will decide which tutor group students are placed in?**

Heads of House, SENCo and the Senior Leadership Team will all contribute to the process.

### **When will students find out which group/House they are in?**

Students and parents will be informed in June/July to prepare for a smooth start in September.

### **Will Vertical Tutoring alleviate bullying? Could it become worse in smaller groups?**

Brookfield Community School does not tolerate bullying. We aim to reduce the number of incidents of bullying by promoting a team ethos within tutor groups and through vigilant and proactive management of the group by the Tutor. Feedback from other schools already using the system suggests a reduction in bullying following the introduction of VTG's.

### **Who will the additional, non-teaching Co-tutors be? What are their qualifications to carry out this role?**

All of our support staff not currently working directly with children, will become a co-tutor who will be an additional adult during tutor time. The co-tutor will be paired with a teacher and will act under their direction. The lead form tutor will be the teacher attached to each group. The support staff also attend additional training for all tutors planned for the summer term. As is the case with anyone working in a school, all co-tutors will have undergone the necessary safeguarding checks to ensure their eligibility to work with young people.

### **How will PSHE and Citizenship be taught to mixed-age groups?**

Teaching some topics within the PSHE and Citizenship curriculum to mixed-age groups can be beneficial as younger students can benefit from the experience and maturity of older students when learning. There will be occasions when students of a particular year group need to be brought together for additional PSHE delivery. Where topics may need further development or differentiation for students of different ages, relationships and sex education for example, these will be explored

further in curriculum areas or through the use of assemblies or 'drop-down' days where students will be organised in same age groups.

**How will you ensure Y11 students, who are already under pressure with workload and preparation for exams, are not put under further pressure in this system?**

No unreasonable demands will be made of the older students in tutor time. In VTG's tutors will actually have more time to support KS4 students at key points in the year. In addition to helping students to achieve their potential in their academic studies we hope to produce well-rounded individuals with the skills and attributes to help them be successful in life. Working in VTGs and supporting younger students can help our older students prepare for this. Furthermore, in the same way that we have made some use of tutor time this year to provide additional support for some Year 11 students in Maths and English, we will look to provide similar support under the VTG model.

**Students in Year 11 will lose key friends. How will you deal with reduced morale as a result?**

As stated previously, tutor time actually takes up a very small proportion of the school day so although students may not be in the same VTG there will be many other opportunities throughout the rest of the school day when they will be able to spend time with each other.

**Will there still be additional pastoral support for students as Heads of House are often teaching?**

Yes. An exciting development with the new vertical system is the introduction of non-teaching Pastoral Support Assistants. These additional non-teaching staff will provide students with additional, high quality pastoral support throughout the school day.

**Will students have a say in who they are/are not grouped with?**

Even when placing Y6 students into Y7 forms we cannot currently grant every individual's wishes about who they are placed with as many contradict each other. The same will be true with the students currently in the school. As we have done previously with Y6 transition, we will gather information from the staff currently working with the students, to ensure that they are grouped with at least one student that they can work well with.