

FAQ on Vertical Tutoring

What is Vertical Tutoring?

It is when the tutor groups are arranged into groups of students from mixed years. Currently we have single year tutor groups (e.g. all year 7, 8 etc.)

A vertical tutor group would have some students from each year group in, probably (4-7) from Years 7-10.

Year 11 will remain separate and Year 10 will transition into their Year 11 year group based tutor group after the June Half term each year. We believe the final year for students requires a different approach and a focus based on GCSE academic mentoring and tutoring where this can be delivered most effectively to maximise outcomes.

Is this some new idea?

We are a Vertical school and only moved due to the Pandemic temporarily with Covid bubble restrictions.

It's been around for a long time, with many schools national and most recently a number locally having moved towards this structure. Many highly successful schools around the country have adopted this system. The Senior leadership Team and Governing Body have previously explored the advantages and disadvantages in the past in 2015 and feel that this is the correct approach as Sidmouth College.

Why is Sidmouth College looking to change?

We are **reverting back** to our old tutoring House based system.

We believe we have lots of existing strengths:

- A positive school ethos
- Staff / Student relationships
- Students feel supported
- Academic mentoring
- Quality academic tracking and follow up
- Positive student to student relationships

The challenge we currently face is that the House system doesn't work as effectively in Year groups and much of the above has to happen in large groups with the same issues at the same time of year e.g. reports for year 10 all require analysis and mentoring with students and tutors at the same time to be effective. This puts extra pressure on everyone, staff and students.

We require a structure that can achieve all of this, but more efficiently. We also would like to extend Peer Mentoring and also student Leadership further through this system.

Why this system?

Schools where VT works currently quote the following:

- A greater family environment in the school, everyone is approachable, no “year group” cultures or perceived blocks against talking to older students.
- Tutors can be the tutors and the mentors – mentoring would not be extra. Peer mentoring happens naturally as older students talk to younger students (e.g.: year 10 supporting year 8 and 9 with options)
- By having smaller year group clusters in each tutor group means more time for your tutor to talk to students as an individual – Year 10 revision planning/coursework support.
- Working with people of different age groups is a more normal social environment.
- It will help prepare more for the world of work.
- It gives better leadership opportunities to students.
- Allows greater opportunity for friendships in other year groups,
- Breaks down year group barriers.

Won't this split up friendships?

- Remember this is only for 20 minutes of the day and does not affect lesson time or social time where the students are free to mix with their year group or anyone from any year in any other form.
- Students would be able to give the names of some students they would prefer to stay with (**must be from same House group**) and given that we agree this is a good idea we would try to accommodate some of this in the groupings - no guarantees, but it is not in anyone's interest to isolate people.

What does this mean for assemblies?

We will revert to both House assemblies and Year group assemblies.

Won't younger students be badly influenced by older students?

The evidence available from schools is exactly the opposite. They grow in confidence, feel more prepared to talk to older students, feel protected by their older form tutees.

We would prevent inappropriate conversations/behaviour which ever year group is present as part of good tutoring.

Younger students reportedly lose their immature silliness (if they have any!) quicker.

How would the school be organised?

We would keep the 4 Houses as our core structure – We would revisit opportunities for leadership such as house captains, sports leaders, creative leaders, prefects etc. within each house. Some of which we have already.

How many students would be in a tutor group?

- There will be clusters of students (4 - 7) from each age-group, all working together in the tutor period.
- The students will remain in the same tutor group for their time in Year 7 - 10.
- This would remain as it is, with each House (or equivalent) having 5 Form Tutors
- Each form having approximately 28 – 32 mixed aged students in them.

- We will also look in to how we can develop co-tutoring, utilising all the staff in the school.

Would siblings be in the same Tutor Group?

Not really. Again this has not been decided but general practice would be that siblings would be in the same House so parents only have one Head of House to contact (we do have some exceptions to this already) but not necessarily in the same tutor group unless requested.

Will students be taught lessons in these mixed-age groups?

No. Students will be in their vertical group for tutor period every morning registration. 20 minutes per day. In lessons, students will be with various students of their own age.

How will Form Time be organised?

We expect that students will be involved in varied activities in order to make a contribution the schools community. Tutor period will also allow tutors to see individual students much more easily.

Older students will be able to assist younger students in many different ways. Tutors will keep a close track of the progress of each student, helping to ensure that all students meet or exceed their personal targets.

Why can the tutor offer better support under this system?

The Vertical Tutoring structure provides staff and students the opportunity to really get to know each other. Tutors will have more time and space for each student. Tutors can focus on small clusters of students as they approach significant points in their school life. When Year 9 students are applying for Option choices, the tutor will generally only have to offer guidance to 4-7 students instead of trying to help 32 students at the same time!

If a student has a problem, it is likely that the tutor can address this straight away or use other students to assist.

How do students of different ages work together?

In a Vertical Tutoring structure, students can also learn a lot from each other. For example, when Year 7 students join our community, they can be welcomed by older students and make an easier transition from primary to secondary school.

When Year 9 students choose Options, they can discuss what new subjects involve with students in Year 10. In addition, we expect that students will learn to listen to and appreciate the perspective of other members of the school community.

How can students of different ages support each other?

Most problems in schools emerge amongst students of the same age. Vertical Tutoring systems can counteract negative aspects of peer pressure and schools which operate a vertical system report a significant reduction in incidents of bullying.

Older students develop a more caring outlook and watch out for younger students in their tutor group. Sensible advice from older students is often more readily received by younger students. Peer mentoring is easily organised within Vertical Tutoring, benefiting both the mentor and the mentee.

What other benefits are offered to the school community?

The structure will offer opportunities to re-launch our House competition between the houses in sport, performing arts, quizzes etc. Rewards and sanctions will be operated through the houses, fostering a sense of loyalty and responsibility to others in the house. In this way, we expect that the Vertical Tutoring to develop positive values and a strong community ethos.

What happens in tutor time??

We will continue to follow our programme of;

- Equipment checks
- Planner and House Points checks
- Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural input making student s aware of the wider world and national events.
- Mental health support
- A quiz
- Well-being and socialisation activities
- Student Council feedback
- Assemblies
- Individual and Group mentoring

Who decides which tutor group students will be placed in?

Heads of House or equivalent, who know students well, will work together to ensure that students are placed in appropriate groups, using the information available. We will also include students being together a bit like transfer from primary school to Sidmouth College where you will be asked who you would like to be with

When will students find out which Tutor Group/ House they are in?

Students and their parents will be informed in line with any agreed timeline as published.