

HEADMASTER'S LETTER 21 March 2019



Dear Parent

TOULOUSE

Greetings from Toulouse! I have the great pleasure of accompanying the Sixth Form Work Experience trip to this vibrant French city. If nothing else, it has given me the chance to resurrect my once fluent, now ailing, French, enjoy a glass of Languedoc wine, a short respite from Brexit and above all the chance to be immensely proud of our students! We have 18 boys with us who are staying with host families and undertaking work experience placements in a range of industries. Some, but by no means all, of the students are taking A level French. I commend this to future years as a really great opportunity to experience work in a different country and improve one's French - good for the soul and good for the CV! I've added a photograph above, but if you look at my @RGSHW twitter account you can see a few more.

#HighHorse

I'm very pleased that our recent work in more carefully monitoring attendance has resulted in our being at the generally accepted rate for our kind of school (though the DfE does not think that Exam Leave is necessary, so it does count as an authorised absence - I'll take the hit for that one as I believe it important). So 97.2% as an attendance rate is good. It is much more than a reportable statistic however; as every day of learning lost, is a day a student cannot retrieve. One area I should like to tighten up is the end of half term and terms. RGS, like other schools, has a tradition of an 'earlier finish' – in our case usually 3pm for half term and 1pm for the end of term. However, our data suggests a spike in illness when we finish early whereas, by contrast, when we finished at our normal time in February (as it was a Thursday and the following day was a training day) we noted a near usual attendance rate. I'll be watching this closely for the remainder of the academic year and would ask that you insist your son comes to school as normal on the last day of half/term.

Before I descend from my 'high horse', I'd also like to mention the Benevolent Fund. As you will be aware, we conduct a weekly (Wednesday) collection for a charity, often inspired by a personal connection with RGS or a visiting speaker in assembly. The amount raised has fallen considerably. I don't think that the current cohort is any less philanthropic but that the 'cashless' nature of the school means that boys do not routinely carry change (though boys easily tend to remember when there is a doughnut or a mufti day!). May I ask that you encourage your son to remember some loose change on a Wednesday and that you will support us as we become a little bolder in our request for all boys to remember those less fortunate than themselves.

HIGH WYCOMBE MUSIC FESTIVAL

The High Wycombe Orpheus Music Festival is an annual, competitive event. Mrs Smith and her husband are involved with the Festival and were delighted to share with me the success of our students: Senior Piano: Sean Cohen 2nd, Oliver Gill Highly Commended (hereinafter, HC); Senior Organ: Sean Cohen 1st, Cameran Johal 2nd (playing the fine Peter Collins organ in the Wesleyan Chapel); Senior Brass: George Hill 2nd; Senior Strings: Saswata Chatterjee 2nd; Senior Woodwind: Joshua Franklin 2nd, Joe Harris HC; Senior Ensemble: HW Music Centre Sax Choir 1st (included Joshua Franklin, Joe Harris and James Pang), Mahler and Me (organ duet Harry Turnbull and Cameran Johal) 3rd; Senior Vocal: Taran Waverley Hudson HC; Senior Percussion: Dan Kimberley 1st; Encouragement Years 7-8: Rowan Flanagan (guitar) 1st, Joshua Ludick (trumpet) and Oliver Tulloch (guitar) HC; Junior Vocal: Joshua Wong 3rd. Many congratulations to all young musicians.

MUSIC

West Side Story is shaping up well and I do hope that you will book your tickets in the next few days. When I used to produce shows in my Director of Music days, I had a 'mantra' which was simply this "if people go away saying it was 'good for a school' I haven't done my job, but if people say it was a great evening of entertainment, then I probably have". RGS is no different and I know we will all go away entertained and moved in equal measure having enjoyed a super cast, well-resourced technical expertise and a fine band. The box office link is [HERE](#). Many thanks to those who have sent in contributions towards offsetting the expenses of the show - there is still time to [donate](#) if you are willing and able to do so.

SURVEYS

Year 7 parents have been sent a link to a survey, which is concerned with the 'settling in to RGS' process. I would encourage all parents, for whom this is intended to complete it. We do take feedback very seriously and it is a 'true saying, worthy of all to be received' that the time taken to complete the survey has a disproportionately positive impact on your son's education. We will be conducting a survey for parents of all years, early in the summer term so perhaps it may be an idea to start gathering your thoughts.

PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS

I don't need to remind parents that public examinations are just around the corner. The mock exams data is encouraging though the key is now that final push towards the real thing. As ever, please do not hesitate to contact your son's teacher if you need advice or support. The balance between working really hard but also taking some time out cannot be overstated. Perhaps the most important job now is to ensure that a holiday revision timetable of (at the very least) 50 hours is constructed. Some boys, we know, will do more than this.

TWITTER

Just a reminder to follow our Twitter accounts @RGSHW is my account and many areas of the school have subsidiary accounts eg @RGSHWEnglish. English, by the way, is a good example to flag up as it contains many useful revision resources. The Twitter profile of the School has developed considerably so please do join us. I won't use Twitter for important announcements (school closures etc) and I won't routinely engage in discussion, so if you have concerns please email the School instead.

CCF – Youens Company - Exercise Sharpe's Attack - Sennybridge, Wales: A report from Mr Rose

'Over the weekend of 8 – 10 March 2019, 31 boys from RGS and 28 girls from Tunbridge Wells Girls Grammar School (TWGGS) attended the RGS organised and run 'Exercise Sharpe's Attack'. This was a tactical field exercise which pitted the cadets from both schools against the elements on the British Army's most challenging of infantry training areas, Sennybridge in the Brecon Beacons. Over the course of the weekend, we experienced horizontal rain, hail and sunshine, all in the space of a few hours! Combined with the challenges of the weather, the cadets had to face the forbidding terrain, with many falling victim to the climb up what became known as 'the hill of death'. Two simultaneous platoon attacks, a company level clearance of a woodblock and a dawn company attack onto Cilieni urban warfare village pushed the cadets to their limits and gave them unparalleled experiences, which will stand them in good stead for the coming Military Skills and Cadet Cambrian Patrol competitions. We wish the best of luck to our teams who will be representing the RGS at both events. Thanks must go to the outstanding assistance given by the astonishing 19 members of staff from both schools who came and supported the exercise and made it all happen.'

I'd like to add my own thanks to staff who give of their time to support the CCF (and many other) activities. I attended the CCF Headteacher Conference last month and I was very pleased to hear that schools who have recently set up contingents are finding it a very valuable asset within a short space of time. It gave me the chance to reflect on how comprehensive, well run, well supported and well known our CCF is at RGS. Long may it continue!

Year 12 Geography Field Trip: Blencathra, Lake District: A report from Mr Zair

'Thank you all so much for your support in making this trip happen – I'm sure that this was one field trip the boys will remember! Highlights included almost getting snowed in (we had to arm ourselves with shovels to clear the hill of snow before even leaving the centre on Saturday morning), experiencing virtually every weather-type possible (other than warmth/prolonged sunshine), and generally being around such a super bunch of students. They were all excellent. We think these trips are a superb taste of geography in the field, and it is always very clear how useful the knowledge the boys gain really is in underpinning their studies at school. Thank you again for your support!'

FENCING SUCCESS: A report from Mr Eve

'The RGS Fencing team achieved a number of individual and team successes at the Public Schools Fencing Championships at Crystal Palace last week. Fourteen of our squad, which ranged in age from Years 8 to 13, came through the group-stages to context the knockout rounds at the event, which brings together many of the best fencers in the country. Among our more experienced competitors, Tom Mason and Louis Gosling went furthest by reaching the last sixteen in the Senior Epee and Junior Sabre respectively. Reda Zarrad and Pranav Chaganty, both in Year 9, also made the last 16 in the Mount-Haes (U15) section of the competition. Sean Metcalfe, Jonathan Yeates, Harry Walden, Jan Goede and Kian Pourkarimi - reached the last 32. Two years ago, few of our boys made it out of the group-stages; only a handful won their last 64 flights. This rapid progress resulted in RGS winning the Centenary Cup, awarded to the school with the best year-on-year improvement in their total points in the competition.'

Philip Wayne