

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

21 September 2020

Dear Parent

WELCOME and WELCOME BACK

It is such a pleasure to see everyone again after a prolonged period of disruption to school life. A very warm welcome to new boys and their families. I hope that you all make the most of every opportunity afforded by RGS and play as full a part in school life as you can. As we could not accommodate the whole of the catchment area choices in our usual six forms, we were able to take an extra form in Year 7, leading to a year group of 210. We have also been joined by 30 new Sixth Formers to Year 12. Welcome back to a full boarding house including boys new to the School and those who have converted from day places in the Sixth Form.

We aim to communicate well with parents, especially in these more challenging times. I write a 'Headmaster's Letter' two to three times each half term. All letters are sent out on Monday or Thursday and are also published on the School website - a number of these will be 'Covid specific'. You may also like to follow us on Twitter @rgshw - this is my account from which you can get access to departmental accounts. In the case of an emergency (such as a school closure) an email will be sent out in a timely fashion and the information will be posted on the School website.

Staff are busy, but will always aim to respond to your concerns quickly. Please do bear in mind that there will be days when staff are teaching all day and may not get to emails until the boys have gone home. Many staff are parents and understand the urgencies and frustrations of the school/home interface but they, too, are only human and much prefer polite emails to get the communication off to a good start!

COVID

My Headmaster's Letter is not the vehicle for Covid related information. Further to the exceptional briefing by the Government this morning, I would, however, request the following:

- Please read all letters from the School regarding Covid carefully; you will understand, I am sure, that shifting sands of guidance requires regular updates to parents. I would like to emphasise that your sons have been superb since the return and have co-operated well with mask-wearing, the sanitising of hands changes to usual practices and the reduction in some provision.
- In line with the guidance, I would ask that you discuss the following with your sons:
 - Their responsibility for reducing their own individual risk. During break and lunch, we have asked that boys **stay in groups of six**, thus reducing their risk and also allowing us to better track any cases (of which we currently have none) that might occur within our community. Boys should understand that the risk is not only to them, but also to more vulnerable members of our society.
 - I thank you for your support in not sending your son to School if he has one of the three following symptoms:
 - **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
 - **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
 - **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste differently to normal

I have every sympathy for how frustrating the test and trace system is, but for the whole community, it is vital that boys (and siblings) isolate until either they have a negative test result or they have been away from School for 10 days since the onset of symptoms. You may find this link from the NHS of use: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/self-isolation-and-treatment/when-to-self-isolate-and-what-to-do/>

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Might I ask that you consider seriously your family plans for half-term. We would ask that travel is kept to an absolute minimum, that time spent with other households is also managed, that together we reduce all unnecessary links to others. Again, I appreciate that I am straying into home territory here but it is my avowed intent to keep the School 'open for business' and I simply cannot do this without your support.

EXAM RESULTS

There were, of course, no GCSE or A level examinations this year. They were replaced by Centre Assessment Grades - you will be aware that this was not, in the end, a straightforward business. We have robust data systems which informed us that, had the students sat the examinations, outcomes would have been very strong. Our grades resulted in 78% 9-7 and 86% A*-B at GCSE and A level respectively. Nineteen boys are going to Oxford and Cambridge (a metric which is often requested) alongside the majority of boys who are heading off to other stellar institutions. Many congratulations.

We must not underestimate the 'catching up' that will be needed. Staff are keeping a keen eye on progress and we will have measures in place as and when they are needed.

SCHOOL ESTATE

Although the School has taken a significant financial hit, the summer period provided the opportunity for some 'in house' repairs and improvements. In particular, deep cleaning was a manageable priority and the Estate looks in good shape. We were successful in a government grant application to replace the boilers - not exciting, but necessary - which will result in reduced utility bills over time.

We are pleased to have a number of our venue hires back; as well as performing an important role within the community, it also provides income to the School. Our swimming pool remains closed, but we are looking at funding streams to support its re-opening as it is too important an asset to lie idle.

The Estates team worked hard to ensure that the required sanitising products were in place before we re-opened. A specially convened meeting of the Governing Board scrutinised the re-opening plan and risk assessments towards the end of the summer holiday.

STANDARDS

Many thanks for your support with the purchase of the right uniform, shoes etc. and ensuring that your son has returned to school prepared to uphold the standards we expect of RGS boys. I understand that, for new boys in particular, this has been more challenging than usual. Please do keep on top of unconventional haircuts and other variations to appearance, and support us when we challenge them. The point is to keep the boundaries narrow so that staff are not wasting time dealing with ambiguities.

SPORT

There was an impressive amount of sport training taking place over the summer break and it is wonderful to see our facilities in use. There were internal rugby fixtures last Saturday (apologies that we could not admit parents but we will do so once we are confident of the logistics). The very well-attended Sports Camp was successful and gave our new boys a taste of what is to come.

DofE: A note from Mr Clatworthy

'This coming weekend 26/27 September will see around 250 students undertaking their final Bronze DofE assessment, the original having to be postponed due to the lockdown. We have had to make some amendments to our usual offer - for example boys will not be camping overnight. Teams will, however, undertake all other parts of the assessment inc, navigation, team work, camp craft etc. All students have worked incredibly hard during the summer months to ensure all other sections VOLUNTEERING, SKILLS & PHYSICAL have been completed. We are so pleased to support our boys in the final push of a usual year to achieve their full awards.'

May I take this opportunity of wishing the whole RGS community a successful and rewarding year (despite the challenges we will face). I thank you warmly in advance for your support of the School. I shall look forward to meeting you or seeing you again either on the touchlines, at a concert, a Parents' Evening or one of the many events that we hope will take place in the near future.

Best wishes

Philip Wayne