

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

30 June 2020

Dear Parent

We have all had our own pressures at the current time, whether it is dealing with the uncertainties of the dismantling of lockdown, the unpredictable nature of work and finance or continued concerns about health. Few families are unaffected in some way, it seems.

Much of my communication with you has been related to the current situation. I thought that, today, I would get up to my old tricks again, musing on what has been happening before turning my attention to the future.

We have remained open, offering key worker provision throughout, and I have much enjoyed being 'on the rota' to supervise those sessions. Furthermore, it has been wonderful to welcome boys, both Years 10 and 12, back into School to take part in 'Subject Focus Sessions'. I have walked around every day and have been impressed with the diligence with which boys have signed up for the sessions, as well as their active and enthusiastic participation in them. The UCAS preparation days are an important part of the School calendar in any year and it was heartening indeed to see such a large percentage of Year 12 boys engaging with the three UCAS days offered last week.

Year 12 have a very difficult call, I think. It has been tricky for parents, too. The overwhelmingly positive feedback we have received from parents has, perhaps, been a little more guarded from Year 12 parents. My thoughts are as follows... When in school, four (and more especially three) A level courses do not fill a 40 period week. Factor in Games, TAA, private study periods, form time/assemblies, break and lunch, it is not surprising that parents are noticing more 'down time' than they would, ordinarily, be aware of. In Year 12, all of this would be supervised. Of course, the most motivated will make good use of this time at home - those who find this harder are encouraged to contact their Form Tutor, teachers, Head of Year or a member of the Senior Team for guidance. Predicted grades period is a concern for young people at the best of times. Seek our help if you need it.

It is very important that Year 12 boys make the most of the next two and a half weeks - I have asked their teachers to make Year 12 a top priority.

EVENTS:

Staff have been very pleased with the Form Tutor meetings, which have taken place in recent weeks - thank you for your participation and I hope that you and your sons found them helpful. Your support of the Inspiration Weeks has been much appreciated and I know that teachers have been pleased with the responses.

We have 210 Year 7 boys joining us in September. Members of the Induction Team have been contacting parents and boys by 'phone in lieu of the usual transfer days. There is also a portal on our website for our new families to learn a little more about RGS. We are very pleased that our Sports Camps can take place as planned. They have been very popular, so we are aiming to make more places available.

I am just starting to meet, on Teams, Year 7 boys who would normally have their achievement points certificates presented by me. I have also met a number of boys and parents on Teams who have either been doing exceptionally well or who have taken the opportunity to give me feedback on our provision.

We said 'goodbye for now' to Year 11 through pre-recorded videos with messages from me, the Deputy Headmaster, Head of Year and Form Tutor. We are now 'in production' for a similar 'goodbye' to Year 13. We

are so sorry that Year 13 rites of passage such as Leavers' Day, the Leavers' Ball and Parents' Tea could not take place. We have plans for an event in early September to wish Year 13 well as they go to the next stage of their education.

The 'Leavers' Concert' was on Zoom this year. Mr Vennell, who is retiring this year (more later) gave his usual narrative of the year and we listened to pre-recorded items, superbly played by the boys. This has been a stellar musical year with a number of boys progressing to the top conservatoires, two Oxbridge organ scholars as well as those talented individuals who could quite easily take a degree in music, but chose something else instead.

It has been great, too, to see the Senior Rugby squad start training again on the School pitches. Cricket and rowing are looking at providing some sessions too.

Looking to the next two to three weeks:

- Let's keep all of our boys focussed and making the most of the time they have left this year. Many departments are commenting that they are further ahead with specifications than they would normally be, chiefly because there have not been trips, residentials and events which, whilst very valuable, disrupt the sequence of lessons.
- We have a virtual Sports Day to look forward to on Thursday, 9 July (not Wednesday 8, as previously announced).
- One of our greatest traditions, the end-of-year Prize Giving, will be taking place in 'virtual' form via the School's website on Friday 10 July at 7.30pm. As ever, the event will be an opportunity to celebrate the passion, commitment and achievement of our students in the academic and co-curricular life of the School. Besides the usual welcome by the Chairman of Governors and a Headmaster's address, we have two guest speakers – one a former Wasps and England rugby player, the other a distinguished journalist and broadcaster – who will be keen to entertain and share their experiences with us. One advantage is that there is no limit on how many can attend – so please do check in. Login details will be sent shortly.
- Please do buy your @RGSPA [raffle tickets](#). Proceeds towards the refurbishment of room G1. 'Every ticket helps!'
- During the last week of term, we will be giving the opportunity for Years 7-9 to come back into School for a session. The sessions will include some sporting activity for the boys as well as a talk from Mr Wallace and me. Further information from Mr Wallace can be found [here](#).

There is no question that this period has challenged us all. Teaching has not traditionally been the 'work from home' kind of job and changing a modus operandi so suddenly has identified training needs. I have seen staff grow in confidence with the use of technology, some excellent peer-to-peer training (we now have a 20 strong IT 'Geek Squad', who are offering support to colleagues) and a general will to offer the very best provision. I have said all along that it is not possible for all teachers to teach through audio and visual means (home situations, classes of over 30, technological capability) though many are doing so with aplomb, and other approaches can work as well, giving variety to the week. The key is the 'connection' between pupil and teacher, howsoever it manifests itself. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if your son needs further support.

Should we be in a second lockdown period, it would be incumbent upon us to have learned from the last few months and to do even better. To this end, we have a number of training events for staff either side of the summer holiday.

The Prime Minister made a bold statement that 'school attendance will be compulsory from September'. Our preferred and default position is just that for both the day school and boarding element. We just want to get back to normal. We do, however, have a 'Plan B' – which you can see in the attached document prepared by Mrs Forster and Mr Wallace.

My very first video talk to you all stated that 'school life will never be the same again'. I stand by that and I sincerely hope that we will be an even better School for what we have learned since March.

With my renewed thanks and best wishes to you all.

Philip Wayne