

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

28 September 2020



Dear Parent

NEW STAFF

Teachers: Mr Adam Powrie (History); Miss Natasha McDonagh (English); Mr James Chitham-Mosley (Music); Mr James Graham (Mathematics); Ms Zakiya Genders (Religious Studies); Mr James Wyncoll (Mathematics); Dr Gillian Webb (Biology); Mrs Suzan Byrd (Business Studies and German); Mr Hugh David (English and History).

Astra Trainee Teachers: Ms Sian Slade (Art); Mr Craig Turner (Mathematics); Mrs Fiona Chandler (Geography); Mrs Nalina Pitt (French); Mr Oliver Westmoreland-Caunter (History).

Support staff: Ms Sandra Egea (FLA); Mr Eddy Fuller (MRes); Ms Olivia Caesar (MRes); Mr Adrian Jones (interim Finance Manager); Ms Debbie Alison (Payroll Manager); Mrs Sadia Azad (Careers and HE Lead); Mr Cameron Thomas (School Shop/General Assistance).

VALETE

We say goodbye to Lynn Thomas (Resources and Lost Property). Lynn has relocated to the Lake District after 15 years of excellent service reuniting shoes with boys and supporting the Resources Department in her busy schedule; Callum Akerman (Maintenance) is moving on to work for British Gas; Mary Campbell (IT) is moving to a position at Microsoft.

There is little else other than Covid-19 in the news at present, unsurprisingly. However, as you well know, my professional mission is to make RGS a better place; this will be the same for many of you who lead departments and businesses, or volunteer organisations. When I am reflecting, nevertheless, on my own role I cannot help but think of the wider global context; the impact of deaths on 850,000 families, the economic impact in many countries, especially the poorer ones who cannot borrow the trillions, and the inequalities which will only deepen across the world and within society.

On a more local level, whilst writing this I'm half watching a match on TV with a 'canned' spectator soundtrack rather than a real crowd. Furthermore, I have close connections with the music industry which has been decimated by the economic impact of Covid and a trip into London recently emphasised the ghost town our capital has become. Conversely, the growth in joggers, cyclists and a reminder of the benefits of family time seem to have been continued by many. There is constant debate about the health v economic impact, whilst the most important thing we can do as a society is to do whatever is necessary to prevent its spread, but at what cost? Who wins - politics or science? All important questions that you are no doubt debating at home and work.

I am not sure whether schools feature in the press more than many other organisations because the vast majority of families include a school aged child, or whether it is simply because it's 'what I do' and therefore attracts my attention.

HOW IS IT GOING?

So far, on most days, we have had attendance in the 90 %s (97 % is the benchmark in a normal year) with many boys being tested for Covid as a precautionary response to particular symptoms. Many thanks to parents for being pro-active in this. We have had no positive cases as yet, but we surely will. Rest assured, when this happens we will take considered and reasonable action. We will seek advice from the relevant professional bodies and we will keep you fully informed. As you may have seen, already some schools have had to send whole year groups home; we will make every effort not to take such broad action, but please be mindful of our limited control over instructions to which we will be subject from e.g. Public Health England.

The wearing of face coverings has been commendable and without issue; I see boys and staff making good use of the sanitiser dispensers around the school; the 'wipe down' between lessons has become swift if tiresome for teachers with an eight-period day!

We have been blessed with good weather – a boon in such circumstances. The reality is that autumn is with us and we have arrangements in place to allow boys to stay dry when it is raining.

Due to the need to keep the buildings ventilated, ergo the windows open, I have asked staff to be accommodating with boys who wish to keep their coats on. I am aware that we may need to revisit some of these issues as we go along but it was important to get these things right at the start of the year, particularly with favourable weather.

Our IT infrastructure has not coped well with a number of intended improvements, such as a new 'phone system and the (long overdue) migration to Windows 10. Teachers have been incredibly frustrated, not least, because the 'lock down' had galvanised us all into a much more ambitious journey into the digital world. I'm aware it has had an impact on some of the basics upon which you rely, such as Parent Pay. We are sorry about this; step by step the problems are being resolved as we invest in a company who are able to diagnose and cure the problems.

As I walk around the School which I do, almost without fail, each day, there is an atmosphere of prioritising the needs of our boys to ensure they receive an excellent education. We are all aware that the status of next year's public exams are subject to change and performing well throughout the year is important lest there be more teacher input into grades in the spring.

BACK TO REALITY....

We have been very pleased to see internal rugby matches taking place. The Year 7 Rugby Welcome Morning was well attended.

I popped into School on Sunday afternoon to see some of the returners from the D of E expedition exhausted but proud of their achievements. The Duke of Edinburgh scheme has adapted to the situation and 250 of our boys took part in activities associated with Bronze and Silver Awards. Having undertaken the 'how to put up a tent' and Calor Gas cooking at school, the scheme then amended some of the usual practices. It is very impressive that students have cracked on with this, in these strange times. Many thanks to Mr Clatworthy, Mrs Henry and the team of volunteer staff who assisted on the day. The service providers were very complimentary about your sons.

VIRTUAL OPEN EVENT

Our [virtual open event](#) goes live on Wednesday. I do hope that you will encourage families with young, aspirant Wycombiensians to watch it. Buckinghamshire secondary schools have all agreed not to undertake physical events, though we will offer tours of the Boarding House for boarding prospects. When things become easier, we can consider an open morning or two so that parents and their sons can see the School operating as normal.

Jeans for Genes took place though with a much smaller audience watching the band live. There will be a video clip on Twitter in the next few days. What was striking was the unusually low number of boys actually wearing jeans - I put this down to the IT situation hindering communication. Many thanks to Mr Rowe-Elliott for his leadership of this hardy annual.

Best wishes

Philip Wayne