

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

11 January 2021

Dear Parent

I was listening to a podcast last week which described both the challenges and opportunities for young people who were evacuated during World War Two. I can only imagine how distressing it was for many children and their families; these days we would not, in any event, send our children away without processes in place to ensure their safety. There are, however, in autobiographies so many anecdotes of young people making the best of the situation; perhaps the presence of books in their new, temporary home opened their minds to new interests and thoughts.

My father, for example, who lived amongst factory communities in Birmingham was evacuated to his grandparents who were farm workers in rural Shropshire. They lived in a small farm labourer's cottage, and his grandfather, who smoked 'twist' in a pipe (which led to an early demise) had my father working on the farm from dawn until dusk. There was not a book in sight apart from the customary Bible. He returned with resilience and a repertoire of practical skills which he drew on throughout his life.

What occurred to me was the way in which, despite being away from their families, the young people of the day made the best of the situation and grew in character as a result. Whilst I do not compare studying at home with the fate of those children eighty years ago, the need to make the best of the situation rings true today. I hope your sons are, therefore, amidst the restrictions, doing some exercise. I hope they are helping around the house. I am quite sure that they are missing their friends. Whilst they have their various devices to stay in touch virtually, we all know that it is not the same as face-to-face contact. It would be all too easy for young people to 'blame the pandemic' - no exams, therefore no motivation to work; no behaviour points - mess around in 'online lessons'. As we start the second week of our 'online learning' I hope that all boys will seize the opportunity to travel the extra mile they ordinarily would and to develop the skills and embrace the academic rigour which will determine their futures.

We do not currently know what the good offices of the DfE and Ofqual will decide. They are socialising various concepts through their media outlets and representative organisations. These include exam board set tests later in the summer term and some element of 'teacher assessment'. We are being assured that there shall be no repeat of last year.

My message to boys is, therefore clear. Work as hard as you would if exams were happening in the usual way; own your future - the vaccine offers hope out of this situation, and the young people who are thinking beyond this period are those who will be the most successful.

Younger boys may need your support in coping with the 'digital self-discipline' required in an online lesson. We have had some (very few but long may it stay that way) examples of boys requiring a sanction for not being a good 'Teams player' (pun intended). We have been very impressed with the older students who have, of course, had longer to get into the RGS way.

The Government are having to respond to an ever-changing scene. You won't hear me jumping on the 'Government bashing' bandwagon as I know the challenges of leading a School in these circumstances, let alone a country! That said, I do have to stay abreast of guidance and react to it. Your support is appreciated as we think things through and hopefully, do things well rather than just quickly.

I hope that we have reassured parents and boys with the clear message that we will not be conducting any internal exams this half term (we are trying to avoid the use of the term 'mocks' because, whilst it carries weight, it is not a relevant one at the present time). We will keep you informed on a week by week basis. Please note that we have now incorporated a short 15-minute break between periods 2 and 3 (1015-1030). We hope that staff and boys will find this helpful.

There is always a lot of conversation in the Year 12 community about 'dropping a subject' at this time of year. The rationale behind our 'four A levels' package is to offer as much breadth as we can in the curriculum and to give boys some flexibility. It is an expensive option for the School, which we keep under review, but one which has served students well over the years. My suggestion to parents and boys at this stage is, unless a department advises otherwise or the four subjects is a real struggle, that boys do not rush into this decision. A year in which the usual enrichment has not been on offer is, in my view, not the time to narrow options. Furthermore, a year of A level in most subjects provides an additional skill and knowledge set that will be useful and will demonstrate commitment to academic rigour on a UCAS form. There will be a second set of grades issued to Year 12 boys at the end of this month, or beginning of next. These grades will support the decision-making process at home and school. Ultimately, I fully understand the pragmatism of boys and the fact that for Year 13, three outstanding A level grades are the key to unlocking the coveted university places.

We are very grateful to staff and friends of the School (including some parents) who have stepped up to assist with our Covid Lateral Testing programme. We have been able to test scores of staff and boys in our CCF Gaunt Room. Once we are back on site, this process will be a key component of keeping our School safe and operational.

We're very pleased to be able to offer, both in day and boarding, provision for the children of key workers and those who classify as 'vulnerable'. The guidance has changed this weekend, so please do check before registering your son for this provision.

With best wishes.

Philip Wayne