

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

16 November 2020



Dear Parents

HALF FULL

My glass is usually half full (though not for long, if it has a stem) thus my overwhelmingly positive view of young people. A colleague shared some research which shows that, whilst the pandemic has been challenging for teenagers, it also has brought out strengths in them. [This article](#) describes how many teenagers have become volunteers during this time; it's worth a read. I am aware that a number of your sons have assisted with food banks, undertaken charity events, etc. The majority of our boys demonstrate acts of exceeding kindness, helpfulness and simple courtesy on a daily basis. A few examples spring to mind in the last week or so, for example:

- Staff sanitise the desks after assemblies and classes - we've been delighted to see boys offer to stay behind to help.
- I was on a mission before the Remembrance Service to move a piece of ecclesiastical furniture for the event - within seconds it was taken out of my hands by Sixth Formers.
- I have witnessed many boys saying 'thank you' as they leave their lessons.
- On a daily basis, when I am walking around the School, there are very few boys who do not engage positively, raise their eyes warmly in lieu of the smile behind their masks or simply offer anything from a cheery 'Good morning, Headmaster, through to a more relaxed 'Alright, Sir!'.

All of the above brighten a day.

DIVERSITY

One area which, I know, was of interest to many of our boys and staff throughout this year has been the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Meetings I have held with present and former students with an ethnic minority heritage to learn about their experience as a member of the school community have given us an early steer on our approach moving forwards. The Governing Board and staff body are undertaking diversity training, recommended by another grammar school whose board spoke highly of a recent event. It is early days and I am not going to over-promise at this stage. Please be assured, however, that this is very much in our thoughts and we are aware that actions will, indeed, speak louder than words.

PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS 2021

I cannot predict whether the Government will move from their current position of 'exams as usual, but three weeks later'. The devolved parliaments have made their decisions. It saddens me that so much of this is political rather than wrought in the interests of young people.

I will work with whatever decision is made and RGS is ready to do so. The academic members of the Senior Team are reviewing last year's Centre Assessment Grades policy and planning for a range of scenarios within School. We will send out more information in the next few weeks concerning the relationship between progress grades, mocks and any internal assessment we may need to submit to exam boards in the absence of examined content.

PROGRESS

Having just issued Progress Cards across most year groups, we have been impressed with the engagement of your sons. There is a keen focus on academic work post lockdown, to support our students to make the best progress, and we are grateful for your help in this. Heads of Year and Subject Leaders are 'drilling down' into this data to identify any areas of concern; if you have any questions regarding your son, please do get in touch with the relevant member of staff.

CHALLENGING TIMES

I'd like to remind our community that this is a challenging time for school staff. There is a real sense of mission here to do the best for the boys, your sons, whatever the role in the School. The IT issues at the start of term (diagnosis done, prognosis good, progress steady, price - worth paying) added to the anxieties that we all feel during this time. Furthermore, the hoop-jumping that needs to happen to undertake normally routine activities, the challenge of maintaining a social distance, teaching behind screens, visors and masks, as well as preparing and delivering lessons from home, or to boys at home is more tiring than usual. I am sure you will join me in thanking staff who are doing their very best.

TEST CASE

You will be aware that we had a positive student case last week. All went well with the communications to parents and boys and I was pleased with the speedy response of the Thames Valley Health Protection Trust, who agreed that our own 'track and trace' system meant only 25 boys have had to self-isolate. We will continue to show vigilance in ensuring that boys who have to self-isolate are making the expected progress across their subjects. This is a two-way responsibility, and we thank you for your support in ensuring that your son has a quiet working space and follows the School day when working. Again, please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have concerns.

ATTENDANCE

We are pleased that we have, most days, 96% attendance. This is impressive; a sign, hopefully, that there is a spirit of confidence in our robust preventative and responsive measures as well as, Deo Gratias, the health of our school community is good. The vaccine has been talked about for many months but it certainly looks as if we are close to having something in place to enable the country, nay the world, to restore some sense of normality to its citizens.

#BUSINESS AS USUAL

Just a reminder that the RGS [Virtual Quiz Night](#), in lieu of the FRORGS Comedy Night takes place on November 28. This is an opportunity to connect with the School again, and it will also support the fundraising efforts for sport. The Academy finances have taken a severe hit following, in particular, the closure of Boarding in the summer term. We all need to get behind these events - we appreciate your support. We are determined to maintain co-curricular provision as much as we are able, despite the challenges. This is in addition to catch-up classes and sessions for small groups of students. There is a House Photography competition soon to be launched - there will be a letter about this next week; the Duke of Edinburgh Award at RGS is showing the same resilience at RGS as its founder - adapted for the situation, here are some of the dates.

- **Bronze: Year 9 (Total 4 days)**
20-21 March - Training and Practice at school, no camping
8-9 May - Assessment in the Chilterns
- **Silver: Years 10 and 11 (Total 7 days)**
24-27 April - Training and Practice in the New Forest (travel night before)
2-4 July - Assessment in the Brecon Beacons (travel late afternoon before)
- **Gold: Years 12 and 13 (Total 9 days)**
2-6 July - Training and Practice in the Brecon Beacons (travel late afternoon before)
16-19 July - Assessment in the Lake District (travel late afternoon before)

IN DISPATCHES

I was very pleased to meet Matthew Duxberry (whom I mentioned in a previous letter) to present him with his Arkwright Award, in a socially distanced outdoor event! Please see the photo above. I'm told that a black mask is not my best look (see overleaf). I also met George Marchant to thank him for some voluntary work within the School.

MASQUER-AID

We ordered some RGS branded masks at the start of term, with a view to selling them in the School Shop, proceeds to school funds! They are currently at the mercy of a shipping company - hopefully they will be delivered whilst still in enforced vogue.

FAREWELL

Finally, we are very sorry to say 'Goodbye' to Mrs Sian Corbishley. Sian joined RGS in 2009 as a new entrant to the profession and progressed to Subject Leader for English in 2015. An exceptionally committed teacher, passionate about English, she has led the department well during which time we have seen an improvement in results and uptake at A level. She managed extremely well, the (forced upon us) transition from IGCSE to GCSE. As a form tutor, Sian was caring and thorough. Following the birth of her second child, the family have made the decision to relocate to Kent before the children are of school age. Currently on maternity leave, staff said goodbye in a specially organised staff gathering sat at exam desks! I'm sure you will join me in wishing Sian, her husband and family all the very best in their new life in the Garden of England.

I do hope that our Hindu families enjoyed their Diwali celebrations, albeit on a reduced scale. I am very aware that many of our RGS families, which represent many faiths and none, are missing religious events throughout the year.

With best wishes
Philip Wayne