

## HEADMASTER'S LETTER 8 February 2021

Dear Parent

Last week, we said goodbye to Mrs Deborah Vorhies, our Chief Operating Officer, who has been with us for the past year. We thank Deborah for her enthusiasm and hard work and wish her well in her future endeavours.

### CHANGE THE SUBJECT

When I was growing up, British Rail was always in the news. Dirty trains, constant strike action which disrupted commuter travel and the inefficiencies of the network were always front-page news. Even the 'British Rail sandwich' was as nourishing for Morecambe and Wise scriptwriters as it was for those who consumed them on the 11.47 to Paddington. Move forward to 2020/21 and the hot topic throughout the pandemic has been 'schools'. Open, closed, exams or not, live lessons or not, falling behind and catching up - there has been a constant focus in the media. I should like to think it is because of the value we all place on education; I also fear that whilst everyone is talking about schools, it insulates other areas from diagnostic enquiry.

### FORWARDS NOT BACKWARDS

I do not believe many would argue with the need to get young people back into school; no amount of Zoom wizardry can replace the connection within a school community. What this last twelve months has proved, however, is that schools, like other 'industries' can adapt with our 'customer focus' always being rooted in the best interests of students. The vast majority of RGS boys have done their best through this most recent lockdown; this is because most of them have high aspirations, supportive homes and good relationships with their teachers who are really putting their shoulders to the wheel.

I read this week that, when the Second World War was declared, a Mickey Mouse cartoon was playing on the television. It was stopped, abruptly. Then, when the war ended in 1945, the cartoon was shown again. Except that it was restarted at exactly the same point at which, six years earlier, it had been paused.

I'm not sure that all the 'doomster' language about a damaged generation or talk about apocalyptic levels of lost learning is helpful – certainly not to many young people, who must feel they are about to be consigned to a never-ending round of the 3Rs, enforced catch-up classes and longer days and terms. My focus throughout has not been about 'missing out', but 'business as usual', doing as much as we can to ensure that we provide a robust academic education, and keep the school community connected with splashes of manageable enrichment to enhance the provision for those who wish it. It is from this platform that, in tandem with the spirit of optimism around the vaccine, we look forward to our RGS future, not simply picking up where we left off, but having learned a great deal about what really matters and doing many things differently - hopefully better.

## **DESTINATIONS**

Sixteen boys have achieved offers at either Oxford or Cambridge. This is very pleasing in an unusual year, in which it has been reported in the press that both institutions have made fewer offers. We have had a change of approach this year with Oxbridge preparation including additional 'mock' interviews and considerable support from our OW community. This augurs well for the future. Of course, Oxbridge is only one of the metrics by which we should judge ourselves, particularly in a school community as diverse as RGS where a broad curriculum supports boys as they access higher education provision. Recently published UCAS subject data relating to university admissions in Autumn 2020 has shown a considerable shift in students towards technology-based degrees, with large growth in Engineering (already our most common destination course), Computer Science and AI courses. Medicine, Law, Business and Psychology acceptances are also on the rise, particularly at the 'highest tariff' institutions. Humanities appear to have declined in popularity nationally (mainly in the mid/lower tariff universities) and, of greater concern (in my opinion) is the decline in the take up of Languages. We are therefore, proud that, at RGS, our Humanities and Language take-up remains strong and year on year we have a balanced profile of subject take up, compared with the national picture.

## **IF MY FRIENDS COULD SEE ME NOW**

A reminder for parents to support your son's teachers as we move into a 'cameras on' culture from today. I refer you to Mr Wallace's letter from last week which gives further information, what to do if your son does not have access to a device with a camera and the various policies which are in place to protect teachers and boys. It really makes the world of difference to be connected in this way.

Boys and staff deserve a very happy half term break; they should be very proud of what they have achieved this term.

With best wishes

**Philip Wayne**