

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

1 March 2021

Dear Parent

I hope that the fine weather, this weekend, brought some joy and optimism about what lies ahead. We are, indeed, close to the start of a return to School. Once more, RGS will be a vibrant community of 1431 students and more than 150 staff. There is, of course, life beyond RGS for all of us and I think we can all anticipate the freedom, the meeting up with friends and family again, going out for a meal, catching a train. And, whilst Zoom and Teams will surely continue to have their place in our personal and working lives, talking together in a room will be a welcome relief from screen time.

I think we all hope that, rather like the parable of the wise and foolish builders at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the national return to some sort of normality is built on rock rather than sand. What we can do, once back in School, is be diligent with mask wearing, hand washing / sanitising and the monitoring and reporting of symptoms, should they occur. The spring weather should mean that ventilating classrooms and corridors doesn't mean hypothermia. I feel certain that all parents will wish their son to be a part of the Lateral Flow Testing programme. As I said in a previous letter, the process is not pleasant but it does get easier and faster; I would urge all boys to watch a YouTube video about it so that they know what to expect.

It has been a pleasure, and rewarding, to support sons of key workers, to know that boys who were not on top of their learning have been coming into School (at the behest of the Head of Year) to catch up. This has, if nothing else, given senior staff the opportunity to see the range of interactions between teachers and boys. As we approach the end of this second lockdown I should like to thank all staff and boys for their resilience, persistence and determination to make #LearnAtHome work so well. This will be against a back story of a range of personal circumstances and I am aware that life has not been easy for some of our families.

We have opted for a measured return to give time for efficient lateral flow testing and for minimal disruption to teaching (which would not be the case if we had all the boys in School next week). Mr Wallace will be writing tomorrow with extensive information about the timetable for lateral flow testing and with guidance on safe practice.

Whatever your son's age, the last few months have been a challenge. The toughest call at present is, in my opinion, for Year 11 and 13. I would urge everyone to remember that this year is exceptional, a one-off. The Government are trying to deal with the fact that young people have missed many months of face-to-face teacher time and they are clearly determined to avoid the challenges schools and young people faced with the, subsequently abandoned, algorithm last year.

Because students will be assessed across multiple pieces of evidence over time, they have more opportunity to demonstrate their performance at higher levels. We should therefore expect more students to perform better than in a single, high-pressured exam season. This is not grade inflation, nor teachers being overly generous, nor a dumbing-down; it's just a different system. We would be very surprised if any school produced a set of results that matched those produced by moderated, externally set and marked exams in previous years.

There is still further guidance due from Ofqual, but as soon as we have our process in place to award teacher assessed grades we will inform you immediately. We have a starting point of assessment windows for Year 13 from the week beginning March 8 and for Year 11 from week beginning 15 March. I stress this is a starting point and there will be several 'baskets' of evidence that will come into play to enable our students to achieve their best possible grades.

Please do not hesitate to contact the School if you require any support. We are aware that this time is a stressful time particularly for those who would, ordinarily, be preparing for GCSEs and A levels.

Many of Year 12 will be joining the students of Wycombe Abbey this week for the 'Management Conference' (known as ManCon by the end of the conference!) This is normally held at the Abbey but we are unsurprisingly migrated online for this year. The event has been running for nearly 25 years - it was very much ahead of its time in terms of independent/state school collaboration. There was very much a 'never the twain shall meet' (on both sides) in the 90s, but both schools transcended political opinions and acted in the best interests of their young people, as we do today. I shall look forward to hearing about it, as well as delivering the final address – very short! Year 12 also have their Parents' Evening this week, which I hope will go well. The feedback we have received from both staff and parents is that there is little appetite to return to these events in the Queen's Hall. The five-minute guillotine seems to be appreciated by both parties.

With my thanks for your continued support.

Very best wishes

Philip Wayne