

HEADMASTER'S LETTER

7 December 2020

Dear Parent

It's cold outside

I'm writing on a cold (outside) Sunday afternoon, log burner ablaze, having watched a fairly sub-clinical England v France game become a nail biting one.

The final push was what made the difference for England. As we approach the final push of (anything but lacklustre) term, I am starting to feel more confident there is hope for good times ahead. I feel the tide is turning in what has been a very challenging time for us all. As the Prime Minister has said, we are not out of the woods yet, but there is definitely cheer in the air not least with the promise of the imminent delivery of a vaccine, the resurrection of further co-curricular activities in the New Year and greater clarity regarding public examinations.

Public Examinations

On 12 October 2020, the Secretary of State for Education announced that all exams across England will go ahead in the summer of 2021 irrespective of what the devolved administrations do. The UK Government believes that examinations are the fairest and most accurate way to measure attainment.

Most exams have been moved back three weeks, with the main exam series taking place from 7 June to 2 July 2021 to create more teaching time and the Government are currently exploring how they can use testing to release those students who may otherwise need to be self-isolating, so that students can sit their exams safely.

In recognition of the challenges this cohort faced and is facing, Ofqual has decided that grading will carry forward the sympathetically wrought grade boundaries of 2020, to ensure that this year's cohort are treated fairly, relative to their 2020 peers. Given there were unintended differences across subjects in summer 2020, Ofqual will aim to spread this 'largesse' between subjects more evenly, so that students are not disadvantaged because of their choice of subjects. There will be further changes, no doubt, but this current clarity is welcome.

'It's a long term'

As with all organisations, we have our own 'sayings'. 'It's a long term' is one such example. The Michaelmas term is indeed an intense period; boys and staff would, ordinarily, be flagging by now. It is even more so the case this year and it would be fair to say that there is a general sense of weariness. I am exceedingly proud and grateful to boys and staff for their unending generosity and goodwill to keep smiling, greeting warmly, helping each other out where possible, even though it has been a tough time. Positive emails from parents have been much appreciated and are always shared with staff, who feel buoyed by the feedback. Thank you to those of you who have had the time to do so.

In quires and places

Our Festival of Lessons and Carols, usually a large-scale event in High Wycombe Parish Church attracting a congregation of around 600 with around 150 boys participating, cannot take place in its usual format this year. We are in the throes of producing a 25-minute 'broadcast' of some of the Biblical readings, choir items and carols sung by our School choirs. If we can make the logistics work, the choir will be recorded from the Parish Church which has the benefits of space, acoustics, atmosphere and, of course a large pipe organ. A link will be available next week.

'Tis the season to be careful

I'm sure we're all looking forward to time with our families and the (albeit reduced this year) festivities involved. At the risk of sounding like a broken record, may I implore families, once again, to minimise risk over the Christmas break. We are determined to support our community by running your son's School, but we can only do so with your help. Please encourage your sons, in particular, to consider their plans carefully, such that there is limited potential exposure to Covid.

Merry gentleman

We have a family dog called Freddie, a cavapoo (we were 'first time buyers' and this hybrid seemed to fit the bill as a gentle way in to dog ownership). I very much enjoy my long walks at the weekend. Whilst out with him yesterday, a friend sent to me a link for a parody Christmas album. It caused me much demonstrable amusement to the extent that other walkers were eyeing, quizzically, my mirth. [Here it is](#) for you to enjoy (an ever so slightly naughty word at the beginning) if you haven't seen it already.

With best wishes.

Philip Wayne