

12 October 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers,

It seems incredible that we are already only a couple of weeks away from half term. Although life has not returned to 'normal', school feels positive and safe and many of the routines of learning have returned.

Students largely continue to do really well. One of the many things that this pandemic has taught us is that young people are a lot more resilient and adaptable than we sometimes give them credit for. They have mostly settled back into school routines successfully and are not catastrophically behind or traumatised as a result of six months of lockdown, as some forecasters predicted. Most are coping well and responsibly with the routines of sanitising and adhering to our separate areas. There have been some blessings through this situation. Our staggered breaks work well and the additional area for students to purchase food, sit and eat has made break times all round more pleasant and stopped the queuing issues which were frustrating for many students. We will continue to review and develop areas for wet weather. What many young people aren't so good at, like quite a few adults, is social distancing. Please can you remind your sons and daughters of the importance of avoiding crowds and grouping, and to respect each other's space, particularly when inside.

#### Celebrating Students

We are working to recognise and celebrate students getting things right and doing well, more. We have started to give a small prize each week to a student in each year group who has strong attendance, no or very few behaviour points, and a decent number of merits. We pick one student in each year group randomly from the pool of about 75% in each year group. You will see these on our website each week.

We are also recognising a 'student of the month' in each class, and this will be followed up with students of the half term in each class too. Praise post cards for these students will be emailed home. We will continue to recognise the significant group who consistently score the highest grade in their attitude scores on reports, and we will look forward to an exclusive Awards Evening for some students who do exceptionally well over the whole year, this summer.

All of these developments are part of our concerted attempt to get better at recognising and valuing the positive attitudes and contributions of so many of our students. I'm conscious that we haven't done this enough in the past and I think that in big secondary schools we often fail to recognise and acknowledge the quiet majority who, often unnoticed, do well and who positively contribute a great deal to our community.

Following this theme, congratulations to Niamh Towers, Rebecca Goodall, Jordan Eaves, Lucy Cunningham Richards and Eini Thomas, all of whom have managed to complete their Bronze Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and to Theo Durrant in the Sixth Form who has achieved his Silver Award!

#### Year 11 Pre-Public Exams (Mocks)

For Year 11 parents, you will be aware that your sons and daughters will be starting their PPEs in just under four weeks' (three school weeks') time. Students have been given their revision planner and some materials to prompt and support their revision. They will receive their exam timetables after half term.

We are drawing on recent experiences and producing short webinars on how to revise effectively which

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are shown in tutor time. These should complement their study periods. This follows on from the Year 11 Success Evening, for parents, which is available from this Monday 12<sup>th</sup> [here](#). Students will shortly take part in workshops with an external consultant, Martijn van der Spoel, who is both highly engaging and skilled at informing students in both the psychology and effective techniques of independent learning. He will be producing another webinar for parents to help you support your sons and daughters in revision. If you would like to attend, please register your interest via our online form [here](#). The evening will be held via Zoom and can be accessed via our website and I would recommend for parents of all year groups to watch. It will be thought provoking and interesting.

You will be aware that, as with last year's exam groups, these PPEs could be more important than ever. We still don't know what will happen next summer and the government have not yet confirmed dates for the exams or alternative arrangements if they can't run. As we have said to students, we have to accept that these events are not totally in our control but if we continue to work hard and do our best, there is every chance that we will get the good grades we deserve. This is what occurred last year and the previous year 11 and 13 have successfully and happily progressed to their next respective stages. It is important that we all continue to keep this in perspective and we have to both impress on students the importance of working hard, revising and doing their best, whilst also not pushing some students too hard and exposing them to excessive stress and anxiety. Do please get in touch if you have questions or concerns.

#### Year 10 Parents' Evening: Wednesday 21 October

Parents' evenings, as with other events where we would normally welcome parents and visitors into school, will continue to run remotely as things stand. Our first parents' evening this year is due next Wednesday, 21 October. **We will finish period 5 early at 2.45 on this day to enable teachers to have time to get ready.** Students who need to wait to get a bus or train will be able to wait in the Arts Café. Appointments will run between 3.30pm and 6.30pm. Year 10 parents will shortly be sent details but you will essentially be able to book appointments online (as we started last year) and you will then be sent links which will take you to your digital meeting at the required time. We will all have to stick rigidly to our times and hopefully we won't have too many 'You're on mute' moments! If you don't have access to a digital device to meet online, we will have a back-up so that you can request a phone call instead.

#### Free School Meals

We are aware that for many these times bring not only health concerns but financial challenges. If you are in receipt of certain benefits or your household income is below certain levels, your son/daughter will be eligible for a free school meal. Please do visit the [Free School Meal Portal](#) to investigate whether you are eligible and to make a quick application. Eligibility can be assessed and an outcome given instantly.

#### Transport and road safety

Finally, please can you remind your children of the importance of wearing masks on any form of public transport and in shops, and of being socially aware and conscious of others when walking in and out of school and around town. In these heightened times, I have received some concerns about crowds of students in streets and on pavements, not thinking of other members of the public. Please can I also remind all of the importance of road safety, whether you're in a car or your children are crossing roads. Please take care if you're driving and remind your children to be aware of the road as they reach for their mobile phones.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Best wishes,



James O'Connell  
Principal