

28 November 2021

Dear Parents/ Carers,

I hope that all continues to go well in your worlds in the run up to Christmas. Life at TCS is generally very positive, though not without challenges. Although we still need to be cautious, school life is almost back to normal with a full array of clubs and extra-curricular activities available. Dance, drama and music have lots going on; art and technology have new clubs (with a new Warhammer community just coming into play); we often have over 100 pupils on the AstroTurf in lunchtimes as the PE team now staff this four days a week, as well as lots of clubs and fixtures; and the Ten Tors teams are just beginning training.

This coming week sees the start of our first two-week cycle of assessment weeks which, followed by a feedback week, end the first learning cycle of the year. The purpose of this system is threefold: to help all pupils to develop revision skills and build their resilience; to collect robust evidence of where pupils currently are in their learning so we are clear about what they know and don't know or can't do yet; and finally to be able to then provide accurate and robust feedback to them and you, their parents/ carers. We will be sending out reports in a slightly new format in early January as a part of this process.

Beyond this, we are looking forward to the Year 9 Options Evening next Monday (6 December) and to rewards events, celebration assemblies and the Christmas Music concert in the last week of term. We hope very much to hold these events face to face, though we continue to monitor the situation.

Pandemic Situation and Measures

We continue to see a currently steady number of people catching the COVID virus in school. We generally have between eight and twenty people from within our community isolating having had positive PCR results most of the time. This includes a number of staff and this, plus a rise in other illnesses and staff needing to look after their own ill children at times, continues to make our own staffing challenging. I don't want to tempt fate but we have not yet seen sharp rises in cases which would indicate a surge of in-school infection. This would be defined as an outbreak which would necessitate tightening control measures. These would include us having to make large events and gatherings virtual, which I hope not to have to do.

I'm sure you're aware of the recent news concerning a new variant and a return to tighter controls nationally. As mask wearing is again being made compulsory in more areas, we will continue with this in public areas in school. Again, please remind your sons/daughters to come to school with at least two masks every day. The most significant thing they can continue to do is to LFD test at least twice a week. If you/they are a close contact, they should move to testing daily. You may have seen that the government recommended to schools that we again set up testing stations in January, following the Christmas holidays, to test all pupils on their return. We will consider carefully but most likely do what we did in September and enable and encourage all to LFD test during an extended tutor time in the first day back, Wednesday 5 January.

Headteacher: Mr James O'Connell

Exeter Road, Teignmouth, Devon, TQ14 9HZ

Tel: 01626 774091 **Visit:** www.teignmouthsecondary.co.uk



Improving Culture and Ethos

When I last wrote to you in early November we were just beginning a simple drive on uniform and punctuality. This has been very effective and led to a marked improvement in standards. We've got the number of pupils late into school down to around ten, on average, each day. We are aiming for 100% on time and we will maintain the tightened procedures we've implemented. Pupils should be in their tutor bases by 8.50 so should be on the school site by 8.45 to be properly on time and ready. We close the gates at 8.49 to give them every opportunity but the culture which we are developing is about being prepared and ahead of the game, not just in time.

Your feedback in late October and pupil voice indicate that the majority of pupils and parents/carers are happy with our school and the standards of education that we provide. Our pupils report that they are generally happy in school and have adults to go to if they need. However, there is plenty of room for improvement and our standards of behaviour is an area we can make significant progress on. This has been highlighted by some disappointing incidents of anti-social behaviour outside of school when pupils are on their way home, as well as by a number of altercations between pupils in the lower years (which only rarely occur in normal times in school) and incidents of totally unacceptable hate language being used between pupils recently.

We worked with an external review team this last week to look at the culture and ethos across all elements of our school, and it was a fascinating and helpful review. We are now comparing ourselves against some of the top performing schools in the country – schools like Dixons Academy in Bradford and Michaela Community Academy in London, which have been mentioned in national news reports quite frequently. There are many different routines and approaches in the top performing schools but what they all share are exceptionally high expectations. This is the bar that we are stepping up to. The review saw progress and the impact of recent drives but has helped us to define our next steps which are all around setting the highest expectations.

In order to enable our pupils to consistently 'Thrive, Care and Succeed' we are going to clarify our expectations of pupils really explicitly and redesign our behaviour policy and systems. This will be launched in January and I will send out more information about this before the start of the next term, but it is going to be an exciting and I believe 'game-changing' move for us.

Significant Seams FREE Christmas Programme with RAMM and the Northcott Theatre

'Significant Seams' is delivering a special two-day programme on 21 and 22 December in conjunction with the Royal Albert Museum and Gallery (RAMM) and the Northcott Theatre as part of Devon County Council's Holiday Activity and Food Programme. This programme is designed for young people (11-16) in receipt of benefit-related Free School Meals, and they are currently authorised to offer 3 free spaces to young people with a SEND diagnosis. Paid places are also available.

In addition to the two days of creative programming and hot lunches, all participants will receive an activity pack of creative inspiration worth around £100 and family food parcel worth at least £55. All participants will also have Bronze Arts Award Advice sessions available to them in

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Winter/Spring 2022, if they would like to pursue this national qualification. To find our more information and book a place online, please go to: <https://bit.ly/HAFChristmas>

Key Dates

Mon 29 Nov-Fri 10 Dec	Assessment weeks for years 7-11
Mon 6 Dec	Key Stage 4 Options Evening (for Year 9), 5.30-7.30pm
Mon 13 -Thu 16 Dec	Assessment week for Sixth Form
Thu 16 Dec	Christmas Concert
Fri 17 Dec	Non-uniform Christmas jumper half-day and end of term
Wed 5 Jan	First day of the new term for all pupils

As above, the last day of term will be a half-day and we will hold a series of celebration assemblies before saying goodbye and wishing pupils a happy festive season at 1pm on Friday 17 December. I hope that you will all be able to enjoy some time off and that we will all be able to celebrate in wider family groups where possible. Take care, and thank you for your support.

Best wishes



James O'Connell
Headteacher