



## From the Headmaster - April 2020

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As we approach the end of our normal term, it is more than apparent that nothing is normal and it is unlikely that we will achieve a normal way of working for some time to come. Indeed, our understanding of 'normal' may well change. One of the usual pleasures of the last couple of weeks of term at a top school like Rich's would be the chance to enjoy a range of events: plays, concerts, final sports matches of the season, charity activities and residential trips. Whilst the School continues to be open for children of Key Workers and vulnerable children, with small numbers coming in every day, it is clearly not the same and I have missed the opportunities to witness the creativity, enthusiasm, energy, talent, and dedication that these end-of-term activities normally present. The greatest aspect of normal school that I have missed in person is that of camaraderie. The respect and encouragement that pupils show for one another, whether as performers, audience, players, promoters or participants is a powerful expression of the great strength of this school community. We all must not let go of this as we face the challenges ahead.

### Arrangements for pupils not coming in to School

I hope that pupils have been using ShowMyHomework to help them access learning activities and a reminder that neither classwork nor homework will be set for what would have been the Easter holidays. Also whilst pupils can use this time to catch up on work that they have been set, but have not yet been able to complete, I hope that a good deal of this time can be spent relaxing and recuperating. Nevertheless, I am acutely aware that this will not be straightforward as many of the usual holiday activities are not available to us all. I have indicated to teachers that they are not expected to check emails nor ShowMyHomework during what would have been the Easter holidays so that they too can have a break and spend time with their families.

In common with our usual pattern of working at the end-of-term, the last lesson that work will be set for will be Friday period 5.

As time goes on, it is clear to me that a number of families, including those of both pupils and teachers, have found this closure period to be extremely hard. Once again, I want to thank you for all for your understanding, patience, tolerance and kindness as these exceptional circumstances continue.

### Staying safe online

There is considerable support available to keep children and young people safe online. Below are some useful links to help parents and carers:

- [Thinkyouknow](#) (advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online)
- [Internet matters](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [Parent info](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [LGfL](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [Net-aware](#) (support for parents and careers from the NSPCC)

### Arrangements for pupils coming in to School (children of Critical Workers and vulnerable children)

The School continues to be open for children of Critical Workers and vulnerable children in support of the country's effort to fight the Coronavirus. The School has already sent an email to all parents who have previously indicated that they may require this provision over the Easter period. If your circumstances have changed or you have any queries in relation to this, please email Dave Dempsey: [dd@strs.org.uk](mailto:dd@strs.org.uk)

### External examinations

The Department for Education hasn't yet published further guidance regarding how GCSE and A Level grades will be awarded. When this new information is available, as a school, we will need time to process this and devise a system that ensures that we are as fair and as positive as possible to all students. Mr Lynch and Mr Daniell will be writing to Year 13 and Year 11 students and parents with further details in due course.

This is an extraordinary period for everyone and whilst our thoughts go out to all those affected by the virus, we do have great sympathy for young people who were due to sit their exams this summer. It is completely understandable that a number are demotivated and disillusioned. Nevertheless, you have our utmost assurance that we will do all we can to work for our pupils' very best interests.

### Final thoughts

It is easy for us to lose hope in these uncertain days and I cannot help draw a parallel between what many are currently experiencing and the Easter story. For Christians one of the most critical moments of the Bible is when Jesus shouts from the cross: 'Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' For Christians, Jesus' suffering and death does not mean that God stopped being powerful for a short while to become limited and human in Jesus, but instead that God's real power is the power of love, that is emptied into Jesus so that humans can see it and receive it. Whether you believe in God of any kind, I am sure that we can all relate to the

notion that during these dark times for people around the world, as the coronavirus continues to spread, it can be difficult to see reasons to be optimistic. Yet, amid all the worrying news, there have been reasons to find hope, not least in the fact that the virus has prompted acts of kindness.

In my email to parents at the end of the Christmas term, I ended by referring to the moving funeral service of Rich Boucher, carpenter at the School and a much valued member of the School community, who died in November. At the end of the service, attended by many members of staff, the celebrant read these words from AA Milne's "Winne the Pooh" and I felt that they were appropriate to end the final bulletin before the Christmas festivities. I think they are even more relevant now:

*"If ever there is a tomorrow  
when we're not together ....  
there is something  
you must always remember.  
You are braver than you believe,  
stronger than you seem,  
and smarter than you think."*

We will endeavour to provide timely and effective communication as this situation continues to develop. In the meantime, I very much hope that you and your family, and the pupils with whom we work are keeping safe and well and, as always, I am hugely grateful to pupils, parents, staff and governors for your commitment to the School; I wish you all a peaceful holiday.

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