

Monday 12 October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Meet the Tutors Evenings This Week

Starting today with years 7 and 8, phone calls will take place throughout each evening between my colleagues and yourselves this week. Naturally, the focus of each conversation will be different, depending on the individual circumstances of each student and their first month back at school. If you have not made an appointment then please do so as quickly as possible and do get in contact with the relevant Head of Year if you have any additional questions.

Attendance

The vast majority of students have returned to school without concern and we celebrate the fact that almost 400 students have not missed a single day since the start of term. Attendance is highest amongst Year 7s and Sixth Formers at 96% and rising, whilst Year 11 attendance (last week) was approaching 100% in time for their mock examinations. Elsewhere the figures are not as high, even taking into account all of those students who have been required to self-isolate because a member of their household has tested positive or displayed symptoms.

Looking at our figures more carefully, it is clear that the number of students who are absent through non-COVID related illness is both normal and comparable with similar schools. **The big difference at CNS is that when students are absent in our school they are typically more likely to have a third, fourth or fifth day off school than elsewhere.** This leads us all to the inevitable conclusion that students are taking too much time off school – particularly those in Years 8 to 10.

Every day off school equates to lost learning, lost momentum and a much higher risk of underachievement somewhere down the line. As the number of 100% attendees testifies, this is not a whole school concern and this is why we shall improve the way we focus our communication, time, face-to-face meetings, and home visits on those students and families whose attendance is the greatest cause for concern.

If your child has already missed five or more days of school (unrelated to COVID-19) then I ask that you look out for a letter from either Mrs De Bruyn (Years 7 to 9) or Mrs Armistead (Years 10 and 11) in the coming days. This will set out a number of changes we are making to the way we support our students and families to improve their attendance levels.

Continued...

Our First Virtual Open Evening

Last Thursday night we hosted our first virtual open evening and we were really pleased with the reception and the smooth use of technology on the night and since. If you wish to, you can watch the evening for yourself via our website and see how we have tried to overcome another obstacle this year.

Winter Warmers

In recent days, I have received a number of questions from parents and carers regarding how classrooms will be kept both warm and well ventilated as the autumn turns to winter. We are mindful that we must continue to keep our classrooms and spaces well ventilated and this is why teachers will open and close windows at lesson changeovers in order to try to get that balance between cold and stuffy rooms. We know that overheated classrooms do not help contain the spreads of coughs and colds in any year and so we need to do better than ever this year.

It is for this reason that we strongly encourage all students to wear four layers with a return to old-fashioned thermal vests and school jumpers. That four-layer combination, including the shirt and blazer, ought to be enough for most of what the British weather systems throw at us. Nevertheless, the heating will of course remain on but we shall all try to strike the right balance to secure comfortable classrooms.

We cannot foresee a need to wear a coat in class (!); however, it is still striking how many students travel to school without a winter coat, even when it rains. If it is not raining, we strongly encourage all students to spend their break outside in the fresh air and therefore we ask that you ensure they have a warm showerproof coat each day for school.

Chromebooks

Another 30 families have purchased a brand new Chromebook through the school. We were able to reduce the cost per device and therefore refunds will be made shortly, if not already. We expect delivery mid-November and will be in touch once the devices have arrived and have been set up for usage. A further round of purchases will be offered again later this term, with deliveries sought for the New Year.

Years 11 and 13 Mocks

We are still in the thick of the mock exams for Year 11s and I hope they are finding them okay. For information, we cannot use the Main Hall at this time and so their mocks are taking place in the less imposing surrounds of the G-Block. They have never been so well prepared for their assessments and we hope that by working with us we can take those students step-by-step through their final GCSE year. Meanwhile, our Year 13s have their mocks straight after half term. The stakes are similarly high and this is why they have also been prepared carefully for the demands of those weeks.

You'll Never ~~Walk~~ Revise Alone

The single biggest source of stress for students in Years 11 and 13 is the examination season. Like every threat, it provokes a fight or flight response. These days we 'fight' shoulder to shoulder with the students by devising detailed revision programmes that identify exactly what to revise each week and in what way. The Get Ahead Programmes (GAP) of the past for Year 11s will be continued, but also introduced for our Year 13s - so that the journey between their mocks and their final exams are never undertaken alone.

And finally...

It is frankly astonishing to think that this is already the penultimate week of term. Our eight week term comes to an end next Wednesday 21 October at the normal time and will no doubt come as a great relief to both our hardworking students and my colleagues - of whom I could not be more proud. That final day of our first term will be a non-uniform day where we encourage students to donate £1-£2 towards THRIVE, one of our fabulous local charities.

Yours faithfully



Mr Doherty

Headteacher

PS Let me end by sharing an email I received the other day...

Dear Mr Doherty,

Last week I was fortunate enough to be off from school enjoying a well-earned break, having worked straight through from the March Lockdown.

Whilst off I decided to go to the Cotswolds for a short break. I have never been before and have to say, I was pleasantly surprised at the beauty of the area.

Even more so, whilst shopping in the local Co-op, with my disabled partner, there was a large number of students from your school.

These students are a credit to you and to your school as well as their community.

They were polite, courteous and extremely well behaved.

It was a pleasure to engage with them. A small group offered help to my partner, they made sure that the way through was clear and they offered help getting through to the escalators.

I would very much like it if you would share both mine and my partner's gratitude and let them know that they should be really proud of themselves.

Thank you

Stay safe and well

Kind regards

M.