



May the Fourth 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope this letter finds you and your family well. The news around the world on the pandemic remains deeply upsetting, but closer to home we are seeing many signs that our normal lives and schools are resuming once more.

Attendance Matters – Now More Than Ever...

Against a backdrop of there being no positive COVID-19 cases across our student community in 2021, we continue to see attendance below not only where it has been in the past, but also lower than similar schools locally and nationally. Whilst every case of absence is of course unique, overall our attendance is excellent in years 7, 12 and 13 – but only satisfactory in years 8 to 11. Why is this?

Returning our attendance to those pre-COVID highs has to be at the heart of our post COVID planning. For many, if not most, there are no concerns whatsoever. However, there are three numbers to bear in mind: XXX, YYY and ZZZ.

- 175* is the number of students in years 7 to 11 who have not missed a day of school since September.
- 365* is the number of students in years 7 to 11 who have missed one or more days since schools reopened in March.
- 215* is the number of students in years 7 to 11 who have missed one or more days in the first ten days of Term 5.

**We have not included any days of enforced absence though self-isolation, school closure etc. in this calculation.*

Now, more than ever, we depend on really high attendance and to avoid any impression that a day or two lost here or there have no consequences. If your child is ill then they are ill, but we ask that whenever possible they come into school, at least for a bit, and see how they get on (obviously, COVID-symptomatic children stay at home until tested!). It is amazing how much brighter a student feels once they are in school and into the swing of things. Whatever the jeopardy level is in your home when the possibility of an absence is being considered... please turn that dial up a notch.

Meanwhile, we are working with other schools to learn from their work and why some similar students in similar schools are currently slightly more likely to attend school. The engagement rate amongst our students stood up incredibly well compared to other schools, but we have yet to fully translate that into superb attendance for over 96% of each year group – except in years 7, 12 and 13.

Our youngest and oldest have attendance that compares very favourably with similar schools – why is this, also?

Continued...

GCSE and A level Internal Assessments

Term 5 is very much up and running with our GCSE and A level Internal Assessments all underway and students working extremely hard. In a parallel universe, we would be starting ordinary public examinations at about this time with their own particular pressures and demands, on students and on colleagues. Teacher Assessed Grades are neither harder nor easier than normal exams – they are different and there is little hiding the normal stakes involved for students in years 11 and 13.

Leaving Days for Years 11 and 13

My senior colleagues will be in touch with students and families in years 11 and 13 in the middle of next week to set out the plans for their end of term leaving dates. We are seeking to find a way to have that traditional ‘final day’ rite of passage, but also acknowledge the fact that not all students finish their final Internal Assessment on the same day.

End of Year Examinations for Years 10 and 12 in Term 6

Meanwhile, in Term 6 our year 10 and year 12 students will be sitting their end of year internal examinations. We cannot avoid the demands this will necessitate, but we shall avoid unnecessary pressures on these students. Nevertheless, without knowing exactly if or how the Department for Education will modify the summer 2022 examinations, we all know that having robust assessment data on these two year groups will ensure we help them reach their potential. Mr Trainer (Deputy Headteacher) and Mr Ward (Head of Sixth Form) will be in touch with the students and families of year 10 and 12 students, respectively, in the coming weeks to set out our end of year examination plans. Meanwhile, it is incredible to think that our year 9s will begin their own GCSE courses in just four weeks’ time.

COVID Update

We should all be continuing with the twice weekly testing on Wednesdays and Sundays. There are some landmark announcements and dates (17 May and 21 June) that are likely to lead to some relaxations in social distancing and face coverings, for instance. Looking further ahead, we expect that our year group zones will come to an end in July and that we shall return to a broadly ‘normal’ use of our site in September.

Transition Update

If you are interested, [you can see some of the work we have begun](#) as part of our annual transition programme. This includes taster lessons and the planned induction day on Friday 9 July 2021. We are exploring the possibility of a year 6 into 7 summer school in late August. If you have a son or daughter about to join us in September then your interest in a week-long summer school is being sought [via this Google Form](#).

Thank you for your continued support and encouragement during this testing period, albeit with every opportunity to truly prepare for the years ahead.

Yours faithfully



Mr Doherty

Headteacher