

WOODHOUSE GROVE SCHOOL

woodhousegrove.co.uk

3rd July 2020

Dear Parents

As we approach the end of a Summer Term like no other, we reflect on the many extraordinary ways in which we have all had to adapt and adjust. I would like to begin by paying tribute to all our young people for their fortitude and resilience during the last few weeks. I know it has not been easy. The stresses and strains of this time have been many and complicated, for our young people, for yourselves and for our teachers and their families. The impact of COVID-19 on our community has taken various forms; first and foremost, we must remember those families who have been directly affected by the virus and the anxiety and pain that has accompanied this.

It has been wonderful – not to say a huge relief – to see members of Year 10 and Year 12 back in school. From my perspective, it is nothing short of a national scandal that we have not been permitted to allow more year groups back into school this term. The Government and the Department for Education should have been planning for schools to reopen from the very moment they were telling us to close and should have been working more closely with teachers and professional bodies to develop trust, open communication and a shared goal. A lack of direction from Government has led to a lack of clarity, leaving parents and teachers anxious, fearful and mistrustful.

Seeing some of our young people in person for the first time in many weeks has brought home how unsettling lockdown has been – students are having to recreate the world that was once second-nature to them, almost as if they are all new boys and girls in their old school. Whilst life returned to the school, it has been, initially at least, a little muted, and there is no doubt there was a tentativeness to the return. This has confirmed to me that our main emphasis in September has to be on getting everyone back, settling them in together, returning to routines and gradually making what was once so familiar as to be invisible become natural to everyone, all over again.

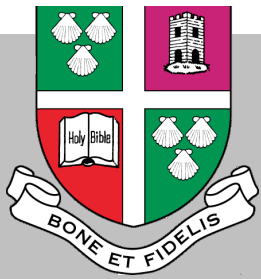
The remote learning has been effective for the vast majority of students across the wide age and ability range. Having canvassed all Heads of Department, we believe that students have progressed through the planned syllabuses at the sort of rate we would expect when they are in school, and while some aspects may have been deferred, other activities have been brought forward to ensure that the gaps can be readily filled when 'normal' school resumes. All in all, there is nothing at all to indicate that Woodhouse Grove pupils have dropped behind their equivalent cohorts elsewhere. Yes, we could definitely have done some things better, like all schools; some families have welcomed the flexibility of our approach while others would have preferred more lessons to be fully interactive. But the evidence is clear that when the students have sought help, teachers have been quick and responsive to meeting their needs, and our young people have been very appreciative of that. So, overall, I think the academic position of all the Grove's pupils who committed sensibly to their online learning is secure.

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I am Grovian.



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What we need to do next is to ensure everyone returns to school with a sense that they fully belong in their old classrooms, that friendships will indeed be re-formed, and that everyone will be tolerant of the many different ways we have changed, or indeed not changed, during the last few months. We will want to see sport, drama, music, activities and general chit-chat return to normal as quickly as possible.

What will next term be like?

As a term unlike any other comes to a close, we are feeling increasingly optimistic about the next one. Just a few days ago I was agonising over the thought of having to write to you all to say that we may not have the entire senior school back together before the Autumn half term, and perhaps not even before January. Thankfully, I do not think this is the case now – certainly the Government in their announcements of yesterday and 19 June were quite clear that every child will be back at school in September, and apparently they mean “every day”. This is what the vast majority of Grove families and teachers want to hear. It really does seem as if schools can now plan for a full return in September.

Having said that, please be assured that Woodhouse Grove’s first priority remains the health and wellbeing of the whole community. We are a responsible organisation and fully recognise the profound obligation we have to safeguard the health of our student body and our staff. Equally, we must also maintain the confidence of our local community.

As a school, we need to know within what constraints we are expected to work, and this is still far from clear even after yesterday’s announcement. Schools also need to be able to cope with the impact, perhaps in the autumn, of any further wave of infections. The events in Leicester over the past week are a stark reminder that the virus is still very much alive and present within our communities. This being the case, although we are now planning for a full return, we are not over-confident, and we note the possibility (some epidemiologists would say likelihood) of sporadic disruption next term as result of spikes in infection rates and local outbreaks. This is part of our planning too.

The following Options still seem the most obvious ones to plan for, with Option 3 the least likely of all, and Option 1 being the most likely, following the Government’s latest guidance that was issued to schools yesterday:

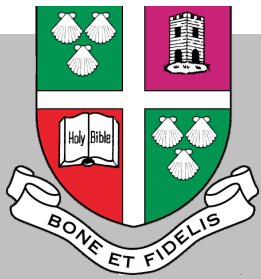
1. We run a school return that is as near as we can get to normal, focusing on the core educational provision, as outlined more fully in the 12 points below;
2. We adopt a cautious and gradual return to school plan including significant numbers of children being taught remotely perhaps with year group rotas or split subject option block arrangements;
3. Teaching remains remote for the start of term following another outbreak.

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With these various thoughts, disclaimers and uncertainties in mind, parents might like to see the sorts of plans that the school's SLT is currently working on. They are highly likely to be changed or superseded as Government advice is clarified or, in keeping with many other policy declarations, reversed or abandoned – so please do not commit us to any of what now follows.

First and still evolving thoughts for the way the Grove might manage a September return for everyone:

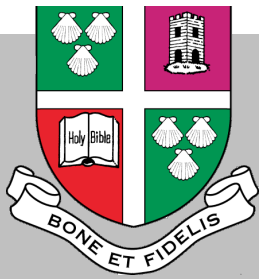
1. All pupils would (in this imagining) return to the Grove for the start of the Autumn Term 2020 as normal.
2. Assuming the school re-opens in this way, then although we would do what we could to provide remote teaching and support for pupils who were unable to attend school – e.g. overseas boarders unable to travel or pupils unable to come into school for health reasons – our main emphasis would be on running the school on site.
3. It is likely that the site will be zoned and carefully marked out. Within the scope of what is reasonable: we will, in all likelihood, allocate discrete entrances and zones for each year group; we may allocate specific times for site entrance to minimise traffic congestion, crowding and help with checks; safe site circulation will be continually reviewed; additional toilet and handwashing facilities will be provided; one-way routes will be in place; we will follow the relevant advice on implementing temperature testing on entry and during the day; we will participate fully in the track and trace scheme; we will continue to make appropriate PPE and sanitisation equipment available; we will operate a very thorough multiple times daily cleaning regime; we will continue to implement our medical policy for handling any cases of infection and all new and ongoing health and safety requirements will be carefully implemented.
4. Some year groups – potentially, the Sixth Form – might start each day a little later. The later start would reduce the need to travel at the peak of the rush hour and would minimise overcrowding at morning drop-off.
5. Lessons would run as normal; however, it is likely year group bubbles would be confined to certain zones within the school to reduce the risk of contact and transmission across year groups.
6. There would be no large group gatherings, across year groups, such as assemblies and chapel services, although we might run remote assemblies in Form Group time, and we may be able to hold individual year group meetings in appropriate venues such as the Chapel.
7. Larger spaces in the school such as the Morton Hall have been ear-marked as possible exam venues for autumn exams should schools be required to host them – there has been talk of nationally

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provided exam venues. Again, if applicable, we would look into how we could enable our new Year 12 students to take their autumn exams with us, should they wish to do so. Many details here remain unknown at the time of writing and we await further clarification from awarding bodies in response to the last phase of the Ofqual consultation.

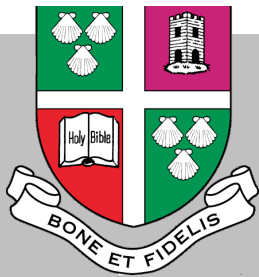
8. The current two sitting, staggered, lunch arrangements would need to be adapted further and lunch service might need to take place in more than one location e.g. Dining Hall, Hastings-Long Gallery and Sixth Form Centre. Given the increased complexity of lunch service, there would probably be less choice. An alternative would be to ask some pupils – on a rotation basis – to bring in their own packed lunch, but we think it would be more enjoyable if the school’s catering team can provide lunch for everyone, even if in a slightly different way. At this moment in time, it is difficult to say whether or not breakfast and tea could be provided for day pupils.
9. The formal school day would, therefore, end at about 4.00pm.
10. We plan to operate school transport wherever possible; we may need to run two buses on the same route if social distancing required this and the departure times at the end of the school day may need to be brought forward. It is likely that students will be required to wear face coverings whilst travelling on school or public transport.
11. Some sport and activities might be suspended or affected in some way; for example, some music and drama events may need to be rethought, and Games is likely to follow a summer Games programme for the first half of term – cricket, tennis, athletics, etc. Matches would either be within the school (e.g. two A teams are selected and they play each other, the same for B teams and so forth – to enable pupils to play others of comparable ability), or we may be able to have some fixtures with local schools if families can drop their children off and pick them up at the relevant school. Inter-House sport would also be encouraged. We would want to bring back rugby and netball as soon as it is safe to do so.
12. If the current guidance were to change between now and September and were we to be told that we could not have the full complement of senior school students on the campus, for whatever reason, we would consider rotas with some pupils at home for two or three days in a week. In such circumstances, we could arrange remote teaching, following a normal timetable, on alternate days for (say) Years 10 and 12, following this with another two year groups, until we were permitted to have all students on site together. Our aim in such circumstances would be to welcome year groups with significant numbers of new students at the start of term, and, of course, we would try to prioritise Year 11 and Year 13 as they prepare for public examinations.

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I would like to thank the school's Deputy Head (Academic), Mr Wright, for planning many different possible "shapes of things to come" with his usual calm precision and clarity. Please be assured that we are fully committed to finding creative solutions to meet the challenges presented by Government guidelines and intend to enforce the necessary hierarchy of controls to keep everybody as safe as we can.

I cannot stress enough that these are just outline plans at the moment – please do not ask for specifics at this stage; they are all liable to change as circumstances change too. Therefore, please do not expect to hear from the school before the week beginning 10 August regarding any firm arrangements for September.

At the end of the academic year we say goodbye to Mr Ryder, who leaves us to take up an exciting new role as Director of Sport at Harrogate Grammar School, and Miss McCrea who will be joining the teaching staff at Bingley Grammar School in September. We also say farewell to three long serving members of staff, Mr Williams, Miss Russell, and Mr Sidebottom, and Dr Allday, who has not been with us for quite so long; we wish all of four of them the very best for a long and very happy retirement.

The new school year will see a number of new staff join the Grove. Please see below the list of new appointments, both internal and external, for September 2020:

External Appointments:

- Mrs Crawford Resident House Tutor (Miller House)
- Miss Emmott Teacher of Art
- Mr Exeter Teacher of Science
- Mr Gill Teacher of Computing and Information Technology
- Mrs Innes Teacher of Economics and Business Studies
- Mr Price Teacher of Science

Internal Appointments, include:

- Mr Davis Director of Academic Systems
- Mrs Jennings Head of Year 8
- Mr Whitlam Head of Year (Sixth Form)

To conclude...

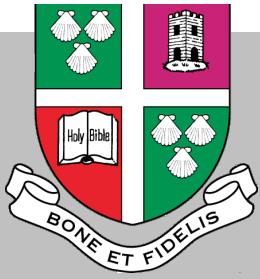
Notwithstanding the significant challenges we all have faced, I hope this term has not been too difficult for you and your family. I know some families have felt they have been brought closer by the experience, although I realise that for some the time together has caused inevitable frustrations too.

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In Psalm 25, the psalmist writes, "Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted". When we all meet again in September, let us all turn to one another to share our fears and our struggles, and respond with kindness, fellowship and compassion. If we do this, we can start to rebuild this school community in which we are all a very special part. Our Grovian values teach us how to live, work and play with others in society and of being part of a community. Community is one of the greatest antidotes to insecurity because it speaks to us of the assurance that we are all in it together. This is what makes the Grove such a special place; as the poem goes, "We are all individuals, yet we are part of something incredible". Thank you for being part of something incredible during this unprecedented period of school closure.

As we look ahead to September and start to tentatively move beyond lockdown, I wish you all a very enjoyable summer.

With all my best wishes,

Yours sincerely

James Lockwood MA
Headmaster

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