

# WOODHOUSE GROVE SCHOOL

woodhousegrove.co.uk

09 November 2020

Dear Parents

As half term becomes nothing more than a distant memory and the nights draw in, and as we head deeper into another period of national lockdown, I thought I would write to you all with a brief update on life at the school. Hopefully, my correspondence will illustrate some reasons to be cheerful at a time when staying positive is proving a real challenge.

## **The term so far**

First of all, I must thank every boy and girl in the school for being nothing less than fantastic. They cannot mix beyond their year group, they all have to wear masks between lessons, they have had to adjust to staggered break times and lunch times in new locations, they adhere to seating plans and sanitise their hands before a class begins, and our co-curricular programme is somehow managing to accomplish good things – but not in the same way as usual. Older students must be wondering what will happen next summer and whether university life will be back to normal in a year's time. And yet, despite all this, for the most part, our young people have all been a complete pleasure to be around and teach. I know my colleagues have felt equally inspired by the enthusiasm and goodwill we all see around us.

To some degree, I think it is because one thing that does not really feel too much different is the classroom: this is a safe space, where students and staff can forget about the pandemic – once, of course, they have sanitised their hands, located the correct seat, wiped down equipment as necessary, opened the windows, checked if any pupil needs to log-in from quarantine, and remembered not to wander round the classroom! Staff responsible for larger groups, including whole year groups, are also full of admiration for the positivity of our young people.

## **Thank you to our Teaching and Support staff**

I am equally indebted to the teaching and support staff for their good humour, fortitude and resourcefulness in such a surreal term. Some are worried for their own health, or that of relatives who may be shielding; others are having to invent and then sustain very different routines.

As ever, in spite of the challenges and restrictions, my colleagues are working tirelessly in the pursuit of delivering the highest possible levels of service in academic provision, pastoral care and co-curricular activities. In addition to delivering these core services, it is perhaps worth recording that since March, we have also been required to provide key-worker childcare centres; to move entire staff and pupil bodies to remote teaching and learning; to devise, monitor and justify the provision of centre-assessed GCSE and A-level grades for our students; to risk assess, staff and manage the re-opening of the school, and to make decisions about health care and track and trace where government guidance has been nebulous and last minute – and sometimes non-existent.

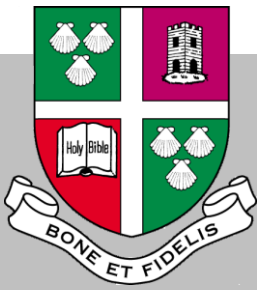
If you had told me back in February that I would be leading a school that had been able to display, in such short order, innovation, imagination and flexibility, that had navigated such impossibly choppy waters, and had stayed energetic, positive and generous in the face of all of this – I might have doubted it would have been possible. But, thanks to the efforts of our teachers and support staff, this has all been made possible.

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*I am Grovian.*



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That said, I am sure, like most of you, I definitely look forward to returning to our old routines when things get better. However, I also suspect we will reflect on some of the things that have happened since last March, and wonder whether even the oldest dogs among us have learned some new tricks, and if so, what changes could we adopt for healthier times?

## New Students and Teachers

A change of school is stressful enough at the best of times, let alone when every school in the country is trying to contort itself into the peculiar shapes required by the Covid epidemic. Talking to the Heads of Year, I gather our new students from across the age ranges, and not just those in Years 7 and 12, have settled exceptionally well – and I am always delighted when I hear that. Well done to each of them on making the change and adapting so quickly to so many new routines.

As recorded in my Beginning of Term letter, we have also welcomed some excellent new classroom teachers this term. As usual, I met with all our new starters prior to half term in order to see how they were settling in and to get their first impressions of the school. Again, despite the unusual conditions, our new teaching staff are immensely positive.

## Food matters

As I am sure you are aware, in the final week of the first half of term, we conducted a student food survey. As you would expect, student engagement in the survey was very high and Mr Caroleo and his team are hugely grateful to all those who contributed and provided such constructive feedback.

As you will appreciate, upon our return to school in September, our menus had to adhere to Covid-safe guidelines whilst serving in multiple locations across the site to cover the differing bubbles of year groups and teaching staff. We were also mindful of having to potentially close a kitchen, due to Isolation guidelines, if required, whilst still being able to produce hot meals and serve everyone, every day, within the school's normal daily structure.

Following the survey, and now being more aware of how to work within a pandemic, we have created new menu cycles whilst still being mindful of food safety, allergens, staffing, logistics and working in a Covid-safe manner, and also adhering to food standard guidelines relating specifically to the coronavirus.

Our number one priority is the safety of your children, the catering team and the wider school community. We have made some changes to our kitchen and Dining Hall that will ensure everyone can eat safely with us every day.

The Dining Hall offering has been tweaked and now includes yoghurts, fruit and salads as further options to increase choice and maintain speed of service.

Firm favourites highlighted in the survey are now back on the menu:

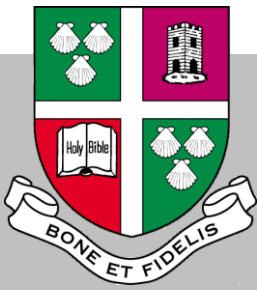
- Chicken Korma
- Sausage and Mash
- Pizza
- Hickory Chicken
- WGS Brownie
- Hot pudding and custard

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In the Hasting-Long Gallery (HLG), we have refreshed the offer but kept to the main look and feel of the hot or cold **grab and go** offering. This term, we have also developed the offer, using feedback from the survey, with favourites such as paninis, curries, chilli and 'on-trend' desserts now included in the grab bags.

Looking at the survey, and reading into some of the comments, the availability of choice compared to pre-Covid times, and, specifically, the ability to choose on the day by going to different counters has been an issue, as has the amount of food children would normally help themselves to. I am confident that the Catering Team has done their very best to address these issues in relation to increasing portion sizes and enhancing menu choices. However, in line with the current guidelines, the catering staff do have to serve everything and, as you will appreciate, the more decision-making required, the longer the time to get the pupils through the serveries.

It remains challenging to be operating in a Covid-secure way and the guidelines have made food service more restrictive. However, the feedback from students has really helped to further develop our offering. The innovation will persist as we continue to find creative solutions to meeting the challenges presented by the guidelines.

## November Themes

Thank you to all those who contributed to and watched an excellent virtual Remembrance Service recorded in Chapel and posted in the school's YouTube channel on Remembrance Sunday. Particular thanks to our Head Prefects, Aisha Mian and James Swarbrigg, who both delivered excellent readings. The school will hold a virtual Whole School assembly on Wednesday 11 November at which students and staff will pay their respects to the service and sacrifice others have made.

The theme for Anti-Bullying Week 2020 is 'United Against Bullying'. Anti-Bullying Week will run from 16 to 20 November. Odd Socks Day for Anti-Bullying Week takes place on the first day of Anti-Bullying Week, Monday 16 November. The school will be holding assemblies and running a number of initiatives during the course of Anti-Bullying Week; the aim being to raise awareness and unite our school community to tackle and stamp out bullying of any kind.

As a nation and indeed a school, we have been challenged these past few months to confront racism and discrimination entrenched within our society. I have said in previous communications that, as a school community, we will not tolerate racism and discrimination of any kind and acknowledged that we have an important role in promoting inclusion and overcoming prejudice. This week is Interfaith Week, and our Chaplain has put together some resources for our students. She will be delivering assemblies to the whole school to remind us that we are all in this together, and that we are all responsible for cultivating an anti-racist community, that embraces and celebrates our wonderfully diverse multi-racial, multi-ethnic community.

It is my belief that we function at our very best when we focus on our shared values, the things that unite us and not on our differences. My colleagues and I are fully committed to do all we can to build an inclusive school and create a more just and equal society.

## Are students where they should be with their learning?

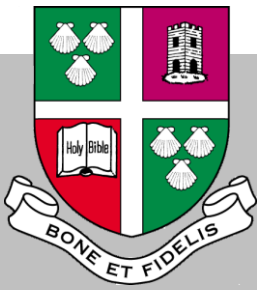
I often ask colleagues this question, and the general view is: yes, very much so. Whilst the school has been affected by teacher and pupil absences arising from Covid-19, lessons, at home and at school, have continued. Public exam specifications have been reduced to varying degrees and colleagues are well aware of the need to ensure that every student feels as confident as they can about the year ahead.

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## Public Examinations next summer

I am pleased that the government has stated unambiguously that A-level and GCSE exams will occur next summer. However, like many in the world of education, I remain nervous over whether or not this ambition will be fully realised. Equally, I am not convinced what difference a three-week delay to next summer's exam series will make.

On this note, for students sitting public exams at the Grove next summer, the changes to exam dates are quite modest. However, one important point to note is that A-level and GCSE results will be released in the same week; namely (respectively), the 24 and 27 August 2021.

## Staying in touch

As ever, please do make contact with the school if there is anything significant causing you or your son or daughter concern. I feel oddly detached at the moment and I do not like the feeling. Normally, I would see parents and pupils at fixtures, concerts, plays, open days, parents' evenings, assemblies and chapel services and so on – but this is not so now. Around the school, however, I can say your children seem in very good spirits. What a relief it will be when we get back to some kind of normality!

In closing, thank you for your faith in us – your good will and support is palpable, and it means a great deal.

With all my best wishes,

Yours sincerely

**James Lockwood MA**  
Headmaster

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