

WOODHOUSE GROVE SCHOOL

woodhousegrove.co.uk

16 December 2020

Dear Parent

Woodhouse Grove ... in the time of Covid

I would like to start this letter by asking you to reiterate my thanks to your sons and daughters for their commitment and fortitude throughout what has been an Autumn Term like no other; they have been nothing less than fantastic. I hope it goes without saying that all parents and pupils must recognise the significance of the Covid regulations and restrictions school have had to deal with. Everyone needs to play their part in ensuring that we are not complacent next term: social distancing, sensible behaviour, wearing masks as required (the vast majority of students have been brilliant in this respect), sanitising, ensuring adequate ventilation and so on: they will all continue to help. At the same time, we will continue to monitor and review all our control and operational measures to ensure that everyone remains safe in school.

Please note that last week, rather belatedly, the **DfE** published an update on contact tracing over the holidays. In essence, the Government is requiring us to manage testing and tracing of our students for the first six days after teaching ends, if a student or staff member tests positive for Covid-19, having developed symptoms within 48 hours of being in school, the School will be required to identify close contacts and advise self-isolation, as the individual may have been infectious whilst in school. School staff are not asked to remain on-call or conduct any contact tracing more than six days after the final day of teaching. **Therefore, if your child tests positive for Covid-19 on or before 22 December 2020, please can you let the School know by emailing Mrs Nulty: Nulty.E@woodhousegrove.co.uk**

This Term

Before I started this letter, I looked at the equivalent one from last year. I had written then about celebrations, Chapel services, plays and concerts; rugby, netball and other sporting victories, pupil triumphs, county selections, and so on. With a shock, I realised it was the last "normal" End of Term letter I had written – the Spring Term ended in lockdown, and the Summer Term continued it. However, I am pleased to report that, in spite of the challenging circumstances, students continue to achieve great things at the Grove, even in this 'narrowed-down' world.

We have done all we can to make school feel almost normal. Our **Catering team** has really stepped up to the plate serving hot meals in multiple locations across the site to cover the differing bubbles of year groups and teaching staff. We have done our very best to run a co-curricular programme. The **Music department** has arranged virtual concerts and supported virtual Chapel services such as the Remembrance and Carol services. I have felt great joy at seeing our students perform in such difficult times. Thanks to the **Sport department**, a Saturday sports programme has run throughout the term, despite some initial resistance from certain quarters within our local community, which all arose entirely from a lack of clarity in Government guidance. We had spoken to our insurers and taken legal opinion to ensure running weekend activities within bubbles was acceptable, which, thankfully, it was. Thank you to the staff who have gone the extra mile to provide these opportunities to our students.

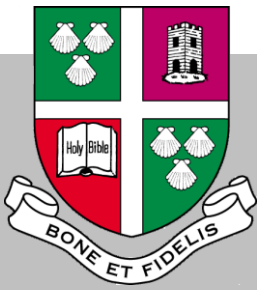
One of the biggest challenges faced has been managing contact tracing in school. This is not something we had expected to have delegated to us by the **DfE** and I cannot thank the staff enough for their hard work and dedication to all the issues surrounding Covid testing, tracking and tracing. Their work rate has been astonishing, and it has been heart-warming to receive so many emails from parents telling us that they have greatly appreciated our regular

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I am Grovian.



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communication and clear and helpful guidance. A special thank you to **Mr King**, who was seconded by SLT to take responsibility for contact tracing in school. His work in this area has been truly outstanding.

Our team of **Support staff** have been indefatigable in the help, support and guidance they have offered teaching staff, and in their efforts to ensure the campus has been as safe as it can be, whilst all having immensely busy jobs regardless of Covid issues. I am most grateful to **Mrs Nulty**, Deputy Head and **Mrs Bates**, Finance and Operation Director, for leading on the School's Covid response. They have worked tirelessly to keep us all safe.

I should also like to thank you, the **Woodhouse Grove parents**, for the understanding you have shown. The way so many of you have written back to Mrs Nulty or me when we have had to write with the latest Covid update has made us feel that the whole **Grove Family** is an amazingly united one, and this kept sustaining us and made us try as hard as we could to make sure school ran as well as possible for every pupil. It also gives me hope for next term; although, I have no doubt that there will be more challenges ahead.

Often, in your emails, you refer to the way **Grove Teachers and Pastoral staff** have gone the extra mile in the sensitivity, speed and expertise with which they have responded to a problem. This has been a demanding time for teachers and I cannot thank my colleagues enough for their incredible commitment, dedication and positive energy all term. I feel immensely lucky to work with such wonderful colleagues.

What will next term look like?

In terms of running the school, I remain hopeful in the long run, but uncertain about next term: it looks to me as if we will follow a similar pattern to this term. Parents and pupils should expect the shape of the school day, and the routines within it, to be very much as they are now.

What is the likelihood of public exams occurring as planned next summer?

I was pleased to hear the announcement last week that next summer's public exams are still expected to take place. I wrote to all parents of students in Year 11 and Year 13 at the end of last week and believe that this announcement will work in our students' favour. Whilst this term some of our students have had to self-isolate for periods of time, lessons have continued to be delivered by remote means, and as I have previously highlighted; there is no evidence to suggest that pupils who committed sensibly to their online learning during the period of school closure experienced any material learning loss. Sadly, this is clearly not the case for swathes of students across the country in other educational settings.

For many students, including the vast majority of Grovians, public exams are an important external and objective verification of their abilities. Yes, students respect their teachers, but they know that teachers look kindly on their own students, and they crave the independent validation of the public exam system. Insecurity is a common teenage trait, and the importance of external verification for adolescent self-confidence and wellbeing should not be underestimated.

How should Grove public examination candidates prepare for next summer?

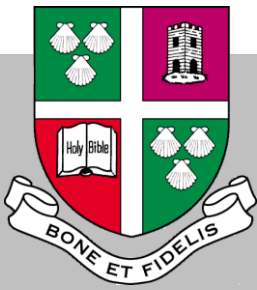
Such is the work ethos of the vast majority of our Year 11 and Year 13 students, and the care with which departments have analysed and met the academic needs of every class, I honestly feel our students should not worry about events beyond their control but continue to focus on the immediate tasks in hand. I frequently hear from colleagues how well

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the public exam years are approaching their work, and I hope this gives parents comfort. My advice is very simple: have a break over the holidays, but also plan and then follow a thorough revision programme for next term's trial exams. Ask for help if a topic is concerning and keep on top of all assignments. Most importantly, do not doubt yourself – and do not worry!

Year 7 Entrance Examination

Thanks to the creativity and ingenuity of our **Admissions department**, led by **Mrs Cadman**, I am very pleased to report that over 130 external candidates – not including Year 6 Brontë pupils – have registered for the School's Entrance Exam in January. Throughout the course of the term, our Admissions team have been running a whole host of virtual open events and on the penultimate Saturday of the term, we were delighted to welcome 50 prospective families onto the campus for a *flash tour* of the school.

As far as our Entrance procedures are concerned, a reduced number of candidates will sit their exams on site on 09 January, with those schools who have six or more applicants sitting the papers in their own setting. The Admissions team will ensure that the Exams are conducted properly while Mrs Nulty, Mr Wright, Mr Cadman and I will also be travelling to the schools to conduct interviews. The remainder of the applicants will sit the Entrance Exam in school. As you would expect, the day will run differently to previous years, but we are confident that we can carry out the necessary assessments in a Covid-secure and controlled manner.

Charitable Works

As we come to the end of the term, and the end of what has been a tremendously difficult year, we can say with certainty that our **Woodhouse Grove family** has risen to the challenges and not been defeated in these unprecedented times.

Whilst we look forward in hopeful anticipation of a better year, we know that for the most vulnerable in our society there will be more suffering ahead. For that reason, we have decided to do our **North Bradford Foodbank** collection in January 2021. Historically, Foodbank donations fall below the monthly average in January, unfortunately, at a time when they are needed the most following the expense of Christmas for the poorest families.

This year has reinforced for us all how much we value some of the things that we take for granted. The freedom of a weekend away, dinner with friends, a trip to the cinema. We are all looking forward to these things returning. However, some of our **Year 13 BTEC Business students** discovered that there are other things that we take for granted, that we do not even think about. This resourceful group developed a social enterprise that resulted in collecting hundreds of various toiletries within school for the **West Yorkshire Destitute Asylum Network (WYDAN)**. The students did so well with their collecting that WYDAN shared some of the toiletries with LEDAS (**Leeds Destitute Asylum Support**) and PAFRAS (**Positive Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers**). The students were told that making shower gel, tooth paste and similar items readily available for the asylum seekers and refugees, might seem insignificant, but it enables them to retain some dignity. We continued our support for WYDAN through a **Form Group challenge** initiated by the Chaplain, Revd. Atkins. The students were asked to think of creative ways of sourcing hats, gloves, and scarves for the destitute guests of the night shelter. Some students were so creative that they even knitted some items themselves.

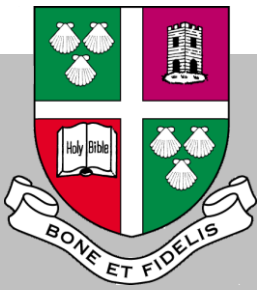
Today, we have had our seasonal **non-uniform day** and I have seen a lot of festive jumpers being sported around school. The funds raised from this popular event will be shared between our school charities, **Edukid**, and the charity voted for this academic year by our students, **Mind**, the mental health charity. One of the blessings of being in school for both

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staff and students is the opportunity for social interaction. We are very aware that self-isolating and limited social interaction can be difficult, particularly for people struggling with their mental health. So, we are pleased to be able to support the work of Mind as they help to connect isolated vulnerable people.

Friends of Woodhouse Grove

I would like to record my sincere thanks to ***The Friends of Woodhouse Grove*** who have been incredibly active in the run-up to the End of Term, masterminding a Christmas raffle, a virtual Christmas market and a *Friends* calendar, with all proceeds made going back to support school projects. I cannot thank the Committee enough for their energy, enthusiasm and entrepreneurial flair.

Reminder of next term's Parents' Virtual Meetings

As things currently stand, the following Parents' meetings will be held remotely next term. Further details will be sent out under separate cover nearer the time:

- Year 9 Wednesday 20 January
- Year 12 Tuesday 09 February
- Year 10 Monday 08 March
- Year 8 Monday 15 March (Forms 8W, 8H, 8G)
- Year 8 Wednesday 17 March (Forms 8S, 8V, 8E)

Return to School

Our boarders return to school on Monday 04 January 2021; with School starting for day pupils at 8.30am on the following day, Tuesday 5 January 2021.

At the end of term, we say farewell to our inspirational peripatetic Teacher of Speech and Drama, ***Mr Archdale***, who has given the school 19 years of outstanding and unstinting service. We wish him and his wife, Michelle, a very long, happy and peaceful retirement. We also congratulate ***Mrs Hughes*** on notching up an impressive 100 terms at the Grove!

Finally, on behalf of all the staff, I would like to send you and your family our thanks for your support all year, and best wishes to you all for the holidays and – let us hope – a healthy 2021!

Yours sincerely

James Lockwood MA
Headmaster

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