

WOODHOUSE GROVE SCHOOL

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26 March 2021

Dear Parents

At a previous school, a newly qualified teacher once said to me at the end of an Autumn Term – his very first term in teaching – that he was looking forward to the Spring Term because he thought it would be easier as it was shorter – until, of course, he realised that we did just as much in the Spring Term, but in less time!

When a grey sky broods over the Aire Valley and sleet, hail and snow is falling on a restless lunch queue, I wonder if Thomas Hobbes' seventeenth century description of human life as "nasty, brutish and short" could be better applied to a typical Spring Term; however, this was, of course, no typical Spring Term...

The Spring Term of 2021 brought with it another national lockdown and a second extended period of school closure, followed by a welcome return to school over the last three weeks. At the end of such a difficult and tough term, I am delighted to report that the vast majority of our young people have been absolute stalwarts in sticking with it.

Sadly, the media continues to be full of stories taking a very narrow and often bleak view of the learning deficit experienced by many young people and the need for a national plan of catch-up: extending the school day, lengthening terms, repeating the year etc. How little they know about what heroics our students and their teachers have been performing in the most difficult and challenging of circumstances. Given all their hard work and conscientiousness, I do not have too many concerns about the learning deficit of most of our pupils at the Grove; although, I do know that some of them, quite understandably, struggled to fully come to terms with online learning. Who would have ever thought that some of them would have actually become tired of looking at screens!

What I do know for certain is that this generation of Grovians is resourceful and resilient. They have gained many skills this term: self-reliance, working with technology, and supporting each other in the chat and on FaceTime, as well as helping friends to overcome any worries and anxieties about returning to school. In the months that have passed, we have had to adapt, learn, re-organise, re-think, and re-imagine how we work, and how we will work when things return to something like normal again. What we have accepted is that Covid-19 has changed things; and we should try to resist just going back to how it was, and instead work to embrace positive changes we can make.

Which leads me nicely onto my teaching colleagues, who have certainly had to embrace change at breakneck speed. I would like to thank our teachers who, throughout the term, have displayed tremendous innovation, imagination and flexibility, and have stayed energetic, positive and generous in the face of all the uncertainty and changes to normal routines.

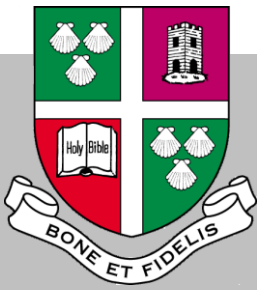
It would, of course, be remiss of me not to mention next term's assessments and End of Year exams. Years 11 and 13 have been given their all-important assessment schedules, their performances in which will be used to support judgements made regarding Teacher Assessed Grades. Whilst all other year groups will be engaged in some form of End of Year tests and assessments; further details will be circulated by Heads of Year in due course, if you have not already received them. For our Year 11 and 13 cohorts, the last few months have, quite justifiably, been stressful; however, please be assured that my teaching colleagues will be working with unity, clarity, empathy, determination and a generosity of spirit to ensure that all our public examination candidates come away with the grades they deserve.

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I am Grovian.



Woodhouse Grove School is part of the Methodist Independent Schools Trust.
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Notwithstanding our desire to do our best for all of our young people, we do need to go through a rigorous process that will stand up to Ofqual and exam board scrutiny. Therefore, for their part, our Year 11 and Year 13 students need to focus on what it is they need to know ahead of their assessments next term, so that they perform to the best of their ability. In this, more than any other year, I want our public exam cohorts to receive their final results in the summer without any regrets and knowing that they gave their teachers all the evidence they needed to give each individual the grades they truly merited. So my message to our Year 11 and Year 13 students is a simple one: please, do not leave anything to chance. Revision can seem daunting or just dull, but real effort, even late in the day, is invariably rewarded. I hope that knowing this helps your son or daughter to stay focused and confident in the next few months.

At the heart of all revision is organisation. Many pupils feel they are naturally “disorganised”, even though they are not. In any case, it is not so difficult to get the different subject files, textbooks, exercise books and bits of paper in subject order out on a table, check them off against the syllabus, and ensure that any significant gaps are filled by contacting teachers, asking friends, or checking online resources, textbooks and study guides. The next stage is to write a rational revision timetable, dividing each subject into smaller parts, and allocating enough time for each sub-section of each subject, increasingly taking account of the order in which the actual exams occur. That is really all organisation for exams involves, but the earlier it is done, the easier the next stage is.

The next stage perhaps requires more will-power. It comes down to reading the material, understanding it, summarising it, slowly memorising it, and practising test questions. The more a pupil interacts with his/her revision material, the more of it is retained – this might involve summary notes, rephrasing or explaining meaning to a friend. Slowly, detail and technique are absorbed, and boys and girls, every year, often do even better than they had dared hope.

It is just over a year since the Prime Minister announced a national lockdown and schools closed their doors until the autumn. As we look back over the past year, we express both lament over all that we have lost, and gratitude for all the ways in which we have been sustained even in our darkest days.

While we take some time over the Easter break, let us not lose sight of the fact that, thanks to your support and the extraordinary efforts of the teaching and support staff, our young people continue to achieve remarkable things. And, as we continue to battle with the challenges presented by the Covid pandemic, let us also all take some wisdom and encouragement from the words written by the Apostle Paul in Romans 12 Verse 12, “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer”.

In closing, I wish you all a very happy and relaxing Easter.

With all my best wishes,

Yours sincerely

James Lockwood MA
Headmaster

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