

23rd October 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Staff

As we approach the end of Term 1, I would like to thank all members of our school community for showing so much resilience and perseverance during recent weeks. There have been many changes around the school to reduce risks linked to Covid but also to ensure that the students' futures remain at the heart of everything we do.

In the last few days we have begun to complete an initial round of mock exams for many of the students in key exam groups. This data will be important so that we can provide early intervention and support to those students that need it. We will also be able to better advise student and parents on how to target their effort in the months before the summer exams. We are reminding all our children in exam years that their attendance is key so that our staff have as much opportunity as possible to assess their progress in case of any further lock-down restrictions later in the year.

Covid-19

I can confirm that thus far our school has had no confirmed cases of Covid-19 amongst its student or staff population. This is in no small part down to the relentless effort of you all to keep our school as safe as possible. We have gone further than many schools to achieve this. Some schools have collapsed their bubbles, been permitting normal visitors onto the school site (including open evenings) or in many respects returned to a normal school operation. We have deliberately avoided this because of our desire to put our student safety front and centre. Parents and teachers continue to have an important role to remind our young people of the importance of regular hand-washing and maintaining social distance from students outside of their year-group based bubbles. I can confirm that this is being reinforced in school assemblies and during form times.

Please can I reiterate that whilst face coverings are optional in corridors during busy lesson-changeover periods we would positively encourage those that want to wear one to do so in those areas. This is particularly the case as we enter the winter months and during busy lesson changeover periods.

New Buildings

Our new classroom block continues to be constructed at great speed. The steel-work has now been completed and bricklayers are commencing their role on the project. We will have 13 new classrooms by May half-term in 2021 which will be a welcome improvement in our school resources for everyone.

As I have previously highlighted, we will also be having school expansion to accommodate up to 2 additional forms of entry between now and 2025. Kent County Council will be funding a number of works around the school to achieve this increase in capacity. They include a large extension to the school canteen, the potential relocation of the school library and a new classroom block to sit in the current location of C Block. We intend on this new block having a number of specialist classrooms

but most importantly it will be home to our performing arts department. There will be new drama and performance spaces that will greatly enrich our curriculum and enhance our student experience. We intend for there to be a community theatre adjoining that building once completed.

Golden Tickets

Our students constantly impress me and we are looking to develop further our House Points system to ensure that hard work, community spirit and commitment are appropriately rewarded. After half-term we will be introducing a 'golden-ticket' system. Essentially this means that all teaching staff will endeavour to award one golden ticket per lesson to the individual that is putting in the most outstanding effort. Winners would typically be those learners that have demonstrated effort above all others, those that have produced impressive work and those that have expertly role-modelled our school values.

We are planning on regularly publishing the names of frequent winners of these golden tickets and linking them to rewards or prize-giving events later in the calendar year. This should give all of our students an opportunity to shine!

Enhancing our Curriculum

Our school governors are keen on us improving our curriculum breadth to complement the new buildings that are being constructed. A particular focus will be on performing arts and drama as we develop specialist rooms to support this. It will mean that we can increase student numbers over time but also increase the range of courses.

Another area that we seek to develop is our land-based learning. It seems a shame to be in a town such as Faversham, which is steeped in rural history, but not have a more comprehensive programme of learning linked to this. So over the coming months we are looking at how we can incorporate some of this into our offer. On a basic level this will likely involve greater emphasis on local studies including rural history in Key Stage 3 learning. We also want to explore what courses we may be able to offer in the Upper School for those young people that want practical learning opportunities outside. This may mean developing facilities on our site over time to support this but also extending the extra-curricular provision that is already on offer – such as raising participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

In the Sixth Form we are looking at developing a pathway for our most academic learners with small class sizes and an offer of excellent humanities A Levels. The intention is to offer a programme that supports progression to the best universities. Currently, we have large numbers of Sixth Formers who go on to study locally at Kent or Christ Church but we aim to get more students into Russell Group universities further afield to study subjects such as English, History, Geography, Philosophy and Economics. This will be marketed as a distinct offer.

Responsible Mobile and Social Media Use

We continue to have a great focus within school on responsible social media use with our students. You will be aware that mobile phones are banned at The Abbey during all parts of the school day on the main part of our site and are routinely confiscated if students fail to follow these expectations. Since bringing in this change around 18 months ago it has had a significant impact on student mental health and social skills. We are seeing young people having meaningful conversations at lunch times

and using this time to build friendships or study together. This transformation is so pleasing to see and I want to thank the whole school community for working together on this.

We continue to urge our young people not to use social media if at all possible. Many sites have age restrictions so we would ask parents to closely monitor whether their child is only using age appropriate apps when at home. Often we find that where children do have ongoing mental health challenges it is, at least in part, linked to overuse of video games and social media. This can lead to children arriving at school with lack of sleep and often having their negative thoughts reinforced through the echo-chamber of online communities with other similarly troubled young people. Adults, including staff and parents, have an important role to play in establishing clear boundaries for social media use and acting as responsible role models. I should add that there is a useful Netflix documentary call 'The Social Dilemma' that is worth viewing for further information around this topic.

Attendance

Attendance this term has been surprisingly good given the national context so I thank parents and students for their support in this regard. Nonetheless, it is important that I reiterate the importance of young people being in school wherever practically possible and safe to do so under the current guidance.

We have noticed that the attendance of exam groups including Years 11 and Year 13 has been lower than those of many other year groups. This is a concern since students need to be in school for teachers to accurately assess their progress and for them to be able to effectively learn. Even if the government change their mind about summer exams and move to Centre Assessed Grades, mock exam papers and evidence of completed work will be key in guiding teacher judgements. In short, it is important for students to be in school for teachers to have the best chance of accurately assessing them.

Term Dates

Last day of Term 1	23 rd October 2020
Staff INSET Day	2 nd November 2020
First day of Term 2	3 rd November 2020
Last day of Term 2	18 th December 2020
Winter Holidays	21 st December 2020 – 1 st January 2021
First day of Term 3	4 th January 2021
Half Term	15 th – 19 th February 2021

Finally, please enjoy the week of half term and remember that next academic year we will be moving to a two-week half term break in the Autumn.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Rowland Speller
Headteacher