

27 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

### **Head of Junior School – Lent Term 2020**

It is hard to know where to begin when writing to you about Lent Term 2020; a term I know we will certainly never forget. When we embarked on the start of a new term and a new year in January 2020, little did we know what was around the corner. The most important message I must convey is one of gratitude and thanks; to you, to your children, to the teachers and everyone within the community who have helped launch us into a phase of remote learning at record-breaking speed with resolve, perseverance and dedication. Whilst it is undoubtedly a very unsettling time, there have been so many snapshots over the course of this first week without the children in school that remind us of the way in which the pupils, parents and staff embody our College values: the courage shown by all when facing this unknown new territory, compassion shown to one another during a period we will undoubtedly find difficult, confidence to try something new, creativity in our approach to delivering lessons and curiosity to explore how we can improve and adapt the offering further.

This week I have been overwhelmed by the photographs, comments and voice notes sent to us to show how families have embraced this uncharted learning from home territory and it has certainly raised our spirits and brought a smile to the face of the teachers through the disappointment of not being able to see the children in person; we really are missing them. From EYFS pupils recreating the Junior School building site in their gardens (though I am concerned that the real building will not be as bright as their multi-coloured Lego constructions), to photographs of work spaces so beautifully decorated that it feels as though they were set up in the National Gallery (it puts my work space to shame), to a voice note from an excited five year-old birthday girl telling me all about her new Heely shoes (apparently much more challenging than they initially appear) to a string of paper dolls as an art project, we have been absolutely delighted to find out about how the experience has gone.

We are also very grateful to you for your feedback, which has been very well received by us all. Of course, remote learning in a Junior School context was always going to be a challenge, creating an offering to suit 3 to 11 year olds meant that we had quite the mountain to climb to prepare and understandably the 'one size fits all' model simply will not apply to all our pupils and parents. Some parents have been able to throw themselves into 'teacher mode' and offer ongoing support, whilst others are maintaining this alongside their own work commitments and therefore a request for one option often comes alongside a request for a different model entirely. What therefore does come through loud and clear is the need of flexibility, understanding and leaving families with options. It was helpful for us to trial what we have in place this week, make amendments, make tweaks and most crucially, do all we can to make it work – this is what we do best.

However, it would be wrong to forget that there were many Lent term weeks in school before preparations for remote learning became all-consuming and it would be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to celebrate the many wonderful achievements, events and moments from the weeks before. In true St Dunstan's style, we managed to fill a shorter term with quite a lot of activity and as ever, no week went by without a buzz of excitement in the air from the events taking place that week.

We certainly made the most of living in London this term and managed to fit a huge variety of trips and visits into the calendar; Reception visited the Catford Library, Year 1 went to the Shard as part of their building topic, Year 2 to the Golden Hinde and National Gallery, Year 3 to the Horniman Museum, Years 4, 5 and 6 visited a range of places of worship as part of their RPE topic and Year 5 also managed to sneak in a visit to the Science Museum to go to the IMAX. As if all this venturing out did not keep us busy enough, the on-site adventures continued!

Reception children arrived at school one morning to discover it was not an average day in school...on that particular day an alien spacecraft had crashed in 00P's classroom (a very creative use of foil and Hoola Hoops on Miss Isaac's part, but the children do not need to know this!), there were footprints leading towards the windows, as an alien had escaped – what a wonderful start to their new space topic. This tied in nicely with the Year 5 end of topic space exhibition and rocket launch – as anticipated, some rockets went higher than the College buildings and pupils and staff were treated to their own space academy tests...it turns out using tweezers to stick pins in a courgette (the supermarket was out of potatoes) is far more challenging than it looks.

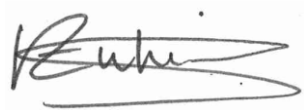
We also enjoyed a parent dentist workshop in Year 1, complete with giant teeth, a trip to the building site, a Nursery visit to the science laboratories to create rainbows, and thanks to Year 2 dressing up as 'People of the Past' I managed to shake hands with Muhammed Ali and hear Coco Chanel and Frida Kahlo talk about their School Council project in a Celebration assembly. Shaking hands with a child wearing boxing gloves presented a different type of challenge, but Muhammed Ali and the rest of the Junior School found it all rather entertaining.

A true highlight of the term has to be the Year 4 production of *Seussical Jr* and I am certain parents at home are still hearing the songs on an almost daily basis. It was like no other performance we have had before – weird, wonderful and wacky, just as you would expect with a Dr Seuss themed production. It was beautifully creative, colourful and fun – a true delight to watch and very easy to forget how young the children are when they put on such a polished performance. What was clear to see was how much they enjoyed themselves and the key messages of being a good friend and embracing individuality is something we hold dear as a school. The Year 5 Showcase with the theme of seasons was also a wonderful celebration of the talents of our pupils and I do not think there was a dry eye in the room for the grand finale.

There are almost too many additional celebrations to mention with the Year 3 boys winning a cross country competition, Ms Marcinkiewicz informing me that she has had a sneak peak at some incredible music examination results to come and £565.67 raised by our pupil-led charity event 'Cakes for Koalas'. I can confirm following some confusion, we are sending the money to help the koalas, and not sending the koalas the cakes.

While it does not quite feel the same in terms of an end of term build up, we cannot ignore how much we have achieved and I have to say I could not be prouder of working alongside such committed teachers who are determined to do the best they can for the pupils in an unknown and unsettled time, the children for embracing this new phase so resolutely and enthusiastically and the parents for their ongoing support. Suddenly the challenge we faced at the beginning of the year of moving buildings and arranging new drop off and collection routines seems so easy! I do hope that you have a well-deserved rest over the holiday period and make the most of this precious time with family, keeping in touch with friends and getting into the fresh air when you are able to.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L Whitwood', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Miss L Whitwood  
**Head of Junior School**