

Headmaster's End of Term Newsletter 03.04.20

Dear Parents and Friends,

These are the most extraordinary times.

I have never had to conclude a term in these circumstances and I am very, very sad and sorry that we have been unable to gather together today as a School, to say Happy Easter to each other and to reflect on and celebrate the success and achievements of our wonderful pupils.

We all know why we had to close the School on 20 March, it was to save lives. We have been given very clear guidance on our behaviour by the UK Government, including on social distancing and self-isolation. The health and wellbeing of the Royal Russell community is literally in our hands and I urge you all act sensibly to protect yourselves and your loved ones. I'd also like to acknowledge the amazing work that is being carried out on our behalf by our health and social care workers and those providing essential services for us all at this challenging time. We have been observing the Thursday evening applause for these key workers and I would encourage you to join in next Thursday at 8.00pm, if you can.

In response to the current restrictions on operating the School and alongside many similar schools and businesses, we have moved this week to 'furlough' a number of staff in order to take advantage of the UK Government's business support initiative, which will allow the School to claim for some of the salary costs of these staff. Parents will be aware of the commitment we have made to providing the best possible education we can in these challenging circumstances and, although there will be no changes to the teachers delivering our remote learning as a result of this process, there may be some changes in our communication channels. Where these changes affect individual students directly, we will contact you to let you know. We are very mindful of the need for prudent financial management of the School at this time and remain absolutely committed to passing on any savings that we can to our parents and, should this be possible, we will certainly let you know.

Over the last two weeks, it has been difficult to step back from the intensity of the decision making and enforced operational changes we have needed to manage as a School, but it is equally important that we do not remember this term only as the 'COVID 19 term'.

Some of my memorable moments include:

- Two super successful Entrance Examination Days for 11+ and 13+ pupils
- An international visit to the School from our Educational Partners, Jianbo Education, Hangzhou
- Some amazing UCAS offers received by our Year 13 pupils, including three Oxbridge offers secured for Tim, Megan and Ella
- The Boarding Community hosting the 'Pilgrims' Way', a 24 Hour Relay for CALM as a part of our Canterbury Tales initiative
- An excellent Senior School 'Challenge Day' for all pupils
- The French Exchange trip from Cours St. Charles in Orleans

- A host of 'Careers Breakfasts' in areas such as: Property, Business and Medicine/ Health and the Careers and Higher Education Fair
- A successful and impressive Showcase Music Concert and an amazing 'Red Carpet' Music Dinner in Great Hall and Dining Hall
- A programme of exciting trips and events held over the February half term:
 - The Senior School ski trip to Huntsville, Utah, USA
 - The Year 10 and 11 History trip to Munich and Berlin
 - An extraordinary Geography trip to the Azores, followed by a Year 12 Trip to Iceland
 - A Spanish exchange trip to Madrid
- The U15's reaching the final of the Investec ISFA National Cup
- The news of some great success with our early GCSE Maths results

These events all take place on top of the full academic and co-curricular programme and pupils and staff have been equally busy with trial examinations, controlled assessments, reports and the preparation for Summer Term ahead. At present, we have to assume that we will be starting the Summer Term remotely, as we are finishing this one.

A huge 'Thank you' for all that pupils, staff and parents have been doing over the last two weeks of remote learning. I have seen some really impressive feedback from this work and, whilst I fully understand that this experience is not as rich as the Royal Russell classroom, it has been great to see the continued progress of all of our pupils.

For those pupils in Year 11 and 13, information on how the collection of evidence for the awarding of GCSE, A level and BTEC grades, has been published by Ofqual today. A separate communication will be sent to pupils and parents in Year 11, 12 and 13 regarding this, which will explain some of the parameters that we will be using. I know that the uncertainty is frustrating for many pupils and, given that this is the first time since public examinations began in 1888 that public examinations have been cancelled, please now allow our Academic Team and Heads of Department to reflect on the details published today. We will provide full information on the processes we will follow, before the start of next term.

We will be offering some additional courses for Year 11 in preparation for transfer to the Sixth Form and Year 13 will have some opportunities to explore 'life skills' in preparation for university and the world of work. We are working to find ways to mark the leaving process for the Year 13 and to mark the Year 11 moving through to the Sixth Form. I am certainly looking forward to being reunited with these pupils when we are able to do so.

For Year 12 pupils, we are planning to run the trial examinations early next term and further details of these will be sent to you today. Ms Tovey and the Sixth Form Team have shared information about our Higher Education Evening, earlier this week. I would encourage Year 12 pupils to use this to start the process of thinking about future opportunities.

We also anticipate running examinations for Year 10 pupils and a letter has been sent today from Mr Selby regarding these.

We are very unlikely to run our end of year examinations for Year 7, 8 and 9 in the same format as we had originally anticipated and we will send full details of our plans for these to you early next term.

At the rather impromptu final Year 11 final assembly in Chapel on Friday 20 March, we sang Hymn 264 'The spirit lives to set us free'. I can't help coming back to reflect on this moment of unity and on a very similar one with the Year 13 Pupils on the same day, as I reflect on what makes Royal Russell stand apart from other schools. This is an amazingly strong community and I am sure that we will find a way through this current challenge by supporting each other.

We normally finish the term with a Final Assembly and say farewell to any leaving staff. Our thanks go to Ms Kanji for her brilliant leadership of the Chemistry Department. Ms Kanji's classes will continue to be taught by Mr Upton next term. Ms Corbat leaves us after one term in the Modern Languages Department and will be replaced by Ms Burns next term. We also say a very fond farewell to our Design Technology Technician, Denise Hinson, who has been the helpful face of the department for generations of Russellians. We wish her a very happy retirement.

Of course, we have put a remote Assembly together for our Senior School Pupils and I hope you can find 20 minutes to enjoy it today or over the weekend.

Please click [here](#) to watch it.

We have also been preparing some additional resources on our Firefly platform for pupils, parents and families to use now and through the start of next term.

For a selection of Cultural Enrichment Opportunities:

<https://royalrussell.fireflycloud.net/remote-enrichment-opportunities>

For guidance on wellbeing from our Health and Wellbeing Centre:

<https://royalrussell.fireflycloud.net/school-information/wellbeing-for-our-community>

For guidance for pupils on looking after their mental health:

<https://royalrussell.fireflycloud.net/senior-school-safeguarding-1>

My thanks to everyone for your superstar contributions to this extraordinary term. Look after yourselves, look after those you love and be kinder than is necessary to everyone.

I look forward to seeing you all back here as soon as it is possible for us to do so.

With my best wishes for a Happy Easter,



C J Hutchinson
Headmaster