

Coronavirus update – 01/05/2020

Dear Parents and Carers

It has been another action-packed week of remote learning at St Dunstan's. There have been a number of highlights, but I must mention two excellent assemblies given on the apt theme of 'resilience', and led for Senior and Junior schools by Mr Gower and Miss Whitwood, respectively. Virtual Forder is starting to get into full swing with virtual choir, 'SDC Survival', photography club and chef Tony's cookery lessons, all taking centre stage in the Senior School. The Junior School have enjoyed bringing virtual birthday parties to life, as well as creating origami dinosaurs and using chocolate buttons to consolidate understanding in Maths (why not!)

There was an important announcement this week with the new prefect team for 2020/21 being revealed; well done to all those who were successful at the end of an incredibly competitive process. We look forward to your leadership of the pupils in the College during the upcoming year. I do hope you are keeping abreast of all our events and developments through following the news section of our website or the various social media channels, all of which have been alive with activity from all corners of our community.

As you would expect, there has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes to ensure that everything continues to run as smoothly as possible for you and your children. Learning and teaching has continued for all year groups, including our unique and bespoke enrichment programmes for Years 11 and 13. For the few students in public examination year groups choosing to sit additional assessments, Mr Brewer, Mr O'Dwyer, and the academic teams have been working hard to schedule these tests. For all those expecting public examinations results this summer, Mr Johnson and his team have been turning their attention to the evidence gathering and analysis that will lead to the grades due for submission at the beginning of June. Mrs Wilkins and ICT support have been working tirelessly to ensure that staff and pupils are able to smoothly access the range of digital learning available, and to make sure it is the best that it can be. Our finance team continues to liaise regularly with those parents in financial difficulty, seeking to find ways to see all families through the challenge of the pandemic. I am aware that the Bursar is writing to you separately with some 'questions and answers' relating to your adjusted fee bills, which we hope will be useful to you. For your information, these mid-term fee bills, which will reflect a discount for the period of lock-down, are due to be issued at the end of this half term. Mr Gower has been liaising with trip operators to establish the most financially sensible way forward. Miss Whitwood and the Junior School have been discussing how reporting can be modified this term to reflect the current circumstances.

At the same time as all of this, we have continued to plan for our future. Various remote 'Away Days' have either happened or are planned for the next few days, allowing the College leadership teams to start pulling together next year's Development Plan for the College. It has been particularly useful to reflect on how the pandemic has sharpened our practice in

many areas, and how we can draw on this going into the years ahead. Our building work continues, and it is pleasing to see a particularly commanding crane now on the site.

You will be pleased to hear that we are continuing to support the wellbeing of Departments and staff, some of whom have extraordinarily challenging personal circumstances, and we are being as compassionate and flexible in our dealings with them as we are with you. We thank you for your understanding in return. We continue to support, in particular, the Art, Geography and Biology Departments.

We are very conscious that your children will be starting (if they haven't already) to really feel the strain of this lockdown and we are very mindful of their mental health and wellbeing. We are always here for you, should you or your children need to talk with us, but we are conscious that adolescence, in particular, can mean that young people are shy about coming forward. It is with this in mind that, in the senior school, we will be circulating an age-appropriate questionnaire to pupils in the coming days to ascertain those who might be in particular need of individualised support. All senior school tutors will also be emailing home next week to establish whether or not you would welcome a one-to-one conversation to discuss any individual concerns at greater length.

As talk turns in the news to a phased return of schools, the College Leadership Team has started planning for this possibility. It is difficult to plan for the unknown, but it does seem sensible for us to start considering classroom capacity and routes of flow around the College, that might best support any social distancing guidance that is likely to be associated with a return to on site education. As ever, of course, we will be led by official health advice. I want to reassure you that we are continuing to finalise our staffing for next academic year. Whilst very few of our colleagues are leaving us (you will be pleased to hear!), we continue to attract a very strong pool of candidates who, whilst being interviewed remotely, are clearly keen to become a part of everything that makes the St Dunstan's community so special and the future so bright, despite the current fog of uncertainty.

Finally, it is perhaps worth reminding you in this letter that next Friday is a bank holiday, marking VE day, a special day for our nation and for our College, as we mark 75 years since the end of the last great war. It also marks 75 years since St Dunstan's ended its last shutdown! Yes, for those of you who did not know, for the latter part of the Second World War, St Dunstan's relocated to Reigate – remote learning of a different nature – and left its Catford home until normality resumed. There is surely a certain irony in that, and perhaps a bank holiday will give us all a moment to reflect that then, as will be the case now, the challenge did eventually pass, and St Dunstan's opened its doors once again.

I do hope you all have a very good weekend and that you continue to remain safe and well.

Yours sincerely



Mr N P Hewlett
Headmaster