

DAME ALLAN'S SCHOOLS

FOUNDED 1705



22 May 2020

Ref: JRH/NLH/010520

Dear Parent(s)/ Guardian(s)/ Carer(s)

I write at the end of what can only have been one of the most unusual half terms in the 315 years of Dame Allan's history. There have been others - one thinks of the evacuation of the war years, for example - but for our generation, the circumstances of recent weeks have been without parallel and I should start by thanking you all for the patience and support you have shown us in these challenging times. I am also conscious that it is some time since I last wrote to you all: it has not been from any wish to avoid doing so, but rather because the picture is changing so rapidly that any information we send out can only be treated as provisional - as you will see from what follows. We do, however, have more control over what happens in school and I hope the weekly update has allowed you to have some sense of how the community is adapting to the current circumstances.

Distance Learning Provision

You do, of course, have an immediate channel of communication through your children. The evidence of our most recent pupil survey would suggest they feel our distance learning provision has been successful - fewer than 10% of respondents felt they were not engaging well with work set since Easter and there were similarly high scores with regard to the availability and quality of support from teachers. The introduction of more live lessons seems to have helped in this regard, but we are aware that, even with such high satisfaction scores, nothing is beyond improvement: please do continue to get in touch with us (enquiries@dameallans.co.uk) if you have concerns about any aspect of the distance learning programme.

Internal Examinations

Of course the weeks beginning 8 and 15 June will see a change for senior school pupils with our internal exam period. We believe it is important to allow pupils the opportunity to display their skills and knowledge - the reinforcement of revision techniques will be of benefit to future school careers - and we also wish to take the opportunity to inform you of your children's progress. We are aware that these examinations will be different to usual - not least in being spread over two weeks to limit time sat in front of a screen - but the key messages remain the same as ever: prepare carefully with your teachers' help and view the exam as an opportunity to show what you can do, rather than a way to find what you cannot! Whilst by no means subscribing to the view that education is nothing more than teaching children how to pass tests, the sense of purpose and structure that the examinations bring is perhaps needed more this year than ever - and if things do not work out well, our pastoral systems are, as ever, in place to offer support.

It is perhaps pertinent for me to share with you Mr Terry's thoughts on Year 12 progress exams and UCAS predictions from his letter to Year 12 students. Please note that the ALIS grade is the possible A Level grade a student might reasonably be expected to achieve at A Level based on their GCSE Grades and the baseline test taken at the start of Year 12:

The main piece of evidence we use for predicted grades is your ALIS grade. We are reluctant to predict below this. Your teachers will then use lots of different pieces of evidence to inform whether they wish to predict above your ALIS grades or not. Usually, one of the key pieces of evidence would be your progression exams but clearly this year that would be unwise. Teachers are being given an extended period up until the October half term to produce predicted grades. This will allow them to test you in the first half of next term if they wish.

Calculated GCSE and A Level Grades

That sense of structure and purpose has, in some ways at least, been denied to students in Years 11 and 13. We are now tasked with proposing calculated GCSE and A Level grades to the examination boards and staff are hard at work on this process in advance of the final submission date of 12 June. Thank you again for your forbearance over this: we simply cannot discuss grades with parents but do rest assured that we shall do all we can to ensure that your children are treated justly in this process. We trust the bridging work for both year groups has proved to be of value: again, please do share with us any thoughts you may have about that.

Speech Day

For many of our Year 13 leavers Speech Day would normally represent the culmination of their Dame Allan's career. A variety of circumstances, not least the current issues around social distancing, have obliged us to cancel that event this year - we could not risk the significant financial outlay of hiring a venue for an event which might not take place. However, plans are in place to mark the end of school for Year 13s with the ball which should have taken place this month now scheduled to take place on 9 January at the Centre for Life.

Partial reopening of schools from 1 June

Looking forward, we have spent much of the last week planning ahead for next half term following the announcement regarding the partial reopening of schools from 1 June. As you will, no doubt, be aware, the picture nationally is by no means clear over this, so what follows is entirely provisional and depends on national developments and instructions from the Department for Education which it seems may not be made public until 28 May. **With that in mind, please could I ask you all to keep an eye on the Schools' website and on your own emails throughout next week.**

Please could I reiterate that no child should be sent to school if they or any member of their household display any symptoms of coronavirus.

Please be reassured that, whatever the Department says, we shall only reopen the Schools if we feel it is safe to do so. As things currently stand, following prolonged and thorough discussion and consultation, we believe that is the case. The groups concerned are:

- In the Junior School, pupils in Nursery, Reception and Years 1 and 6. Mr Laidler has put together a handbook containing information for parents about all aspects of reopening which parents in the relevant year groups will receive today. Whilst life in school will be different to normal, we do look forward to welcoming back those children who are able to attend. Should any child not be able to return, they will be able to continue with our distance learning provision.

- In the senior Schools, **we have no plans to recall Years 10 and 12 in the short term.** We believe our distance learning programme is working well and we see little value in disrupting that in the run up to internal examinations. We are considering the possibility of inviting members of those year groups in to review progress on an individual basis once the examinations are complete and will be in touch with the relevant year groups should we decide to take that course of action.
- We are delighted still to be able to support those of you who are key workers by allowing your children to come into school. Junior School pupils will be accommodated in the junior school buildings (those in the Early Years and Years 1 and 6 with their peers, those in Years 2-5 in separate groups). To allow for social distancing with this increase in pupil numbers on the junior school site, senior pupils whose parents are key workers will now be accommodated in the Queen's Building at the senior Schools. We shall send more information to those families who have indicated they wish to use this service during the course of next week.

Some basic logistic points apply to all these groups:

- We shall provide food for all children in school, though the extra demands this places on our catering team mean that we shall now have to charge all pupils for school lunches, which must be taken so as to reduce the number of items brought into school. Lunches will take the form of take away food - sandwiches, pizza, baked potatoes etc - and a weekly order form will be sent to you during the previous week so that you can pre-order your child's lunch. Please rest assured that the nutritional standards of school food will be maintained. As lunches were not charged for this term, you will receive an invoice for lunches at the end of term.
- We shall not be running our usual school bus services as the rules for social distancing make this very difficult. We are encouraged to share with you the government's advice on travel and public transport which may be accessed here:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers>

Of course, amongst all of this, some aspects of school life do manage to go on almost as usual. In order to operate properly we need to keep updating our policies - especially where the pandemic has impacted on their operation.

Changes to our Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices

We have already written with regard to our safeguarding policy: we now need to inform you of changes to our Data Protection Policy and Privacy Notices which have recently been updated. I would invite you to read these and, if appropriate, discuss the Privacy Notice for pupils with your child(ren). The security of all of the personal data held by the Schools is of the utmost importance to us. Whilst many of the Schools' operations are being carried out remotely during the current pandemic, parents should note that personal data of pupils and parents will continue to be processed in accordance with, and for the purposes set out in, the Schools' privacy notices and your rights under GDPR remain unaffected. However, parents and pupils are asked during this time to read such notices and policies in light of and alongside the necessary adjustments to school life that remote conditions entail.

Indeed one of these adjustments has been the number of photographs and videos, which parents and pupils have been providing to the Schools, showing the variety of ways in which pupils have been spending time during lockdown. With this in mind, our Taking, Storing and Using Images of Children Policy has been amended, with the addition of paragraph 2.4. Again, you are invited to read this. The Privacy Notices and these policies, along with many others, can be found in the Portals on our website, under the Policies and Privacy tabs. If you have any questions relating to our policies or Privacy Notices, please address them to the Schools' Compliance Officer and Data Protection Coordinator, Mrs J. Taylor, at j.taylor@dameallans.co.uk.

Having started with an apology for not having written for some time, I now feel I perhaps need to apologise for having written at such length now! However, I trust the information included here will be of interest and use to you. I hope too that it will help to cement further the sense of community that is helping to hold the Schools together during these extraordinary times. We are conscious that these are also tough times for many of you. Our provision of support for those of you in financial difficulties is a practical manifestation of that community: the COVID-19 Hardship Bursary Appeal we are launching next month is a further manifestation of that - a means to allow the many people who know and love the Schools (primarily former pupils) to give a gift which will help those of you most in need. But the sense of community can be seen in other ways too. In the resilience of staff producing work in entirely new ways; in the wise counsel and support of our governors and, above all in the good faith and efforts of your children - all of whom we are missing just as much as they are missing us and each other. It is there too in the wise words of our chaplain - echoed in Year 10 assemblies this very week - that there is always hope and a light at the end of every tunnel. It may be difficult for us to see amidst the shades of administration and the daily grind of lone working, but there is a future in which Dame Allan's will continue to grow and prosper because of its people, pupils, staff, governors and, of course, you as parents. I hope you all will have a happy - and above all, a healthy - half term break.

Yours faithfully

John Hind

J R Hind
Principal