

Coronavirus update – 19/06/2020

Dear Parents and Carers

This week we have continued to welcome small groups of Year 10 and Year 12 students back to the College. It has been wonderful to see the impact this return has had on these young people, and on the staff, and it evidences in abundance the huge significance of human interaction to individual health and wellbeing. It also, of course, reinforces the absolute imperative that we must strive to reopen St Dunstan's as quickly as we can.

Next week I will be sending all parents and carers a brochure outlining all the very great steps we have taken as an organisation, and continue to take, to ensure the smooth and safe return of our community. I hope that it will give you some reassurance before the summer, as it covers a great range of issues and questions that I am sure you will have. I cannot necessarily answer everything just yet, but I can go some way to outlining our intentions, as well as all we have planned and adjusted, on the basis of the information and guidance we do have. Perhaps most important of all is a clear statement that it is fully my intention to reopen St Dunstan's for all pupils in September. I believe it would be foolish to commit to this unreservedly, or to state, as some independent schools have, that they will do so come what may, with or without government support. We will take a final and informed decision in the middle of August – not too early as to be misinformed, but not too late so as to be unable to prepare properly. I will write to you on August 21 with a definitive line as to our September return.

In the meantime, we continue to plan for the last two weeks of this school year. Next week we see a number of Year 12 students undertake their end of year exams, and we wish them well with that. We also bring back more Junior School classes, from across the year groups, and continue our pastoral work with Year 10 and Year 12. Many of you will have noticed that the government has adjusted its guidance, this time saying that we can consider bringing back Years 7 – 9 for individual meetings. This is not without significant challenge for us now, with just two weeks left to run, and also given the cap on overall numbers of pupils allowed onto the site at any one time, which has largely been filled with our existing programmes. However, where we can, we will consider offering some on-site support individually or in small groups for those most in need of it. Years 7 – 9 will now be focusing on the Festival of Curiosity, having concluded mainstream timetabled teaching, and I am really looking forward to seeing how their independent study skills are best employed during this phase of learning. There are particularly exciting cross-curricular topics to be explored, and, guided by teachers, there is a real opportunity for our Lower School students to shine, through this final phase of the academic year.

As we start to plan for the summer and September, we are also mindful of exam results days. Mr Holmes will be writing separately to parents, before the end of term, with full details about these days, and what we are putting in place by way of virtual support for the students.

We continue to intend to run the Year 10 exams in the week beginning 24 August, and are working with families whose commitments at that time require alternatives. This is such an important opportunity for Year 10 students, to provide accurate data for them, and for us, about exactly where they are in their courses, and to provide a benchmark for their final GCSE year, and so that our teaching of Year 11 classes can be fully informed through programmes of support and consolidation from the very start of the term. A full timetable will be coming from Mr Holmes in due course.

As ever, I end with some highlights from the week.

No week in the Junior School is ever the same. Our Reception pupils put their design skills to the test, creating a tree swing for our new woodland classroom. We are not sure who was more excited – the teachers or the pupils! Year 1 have been working on their presenting skills; without being able to pass objects around for Show and Tell, they have really improved their skills in explanation and description. We can confirm that, sadly, despite their amazing ‘Missing Traction Man’ posters, there is still no sign of him (although rumour has it, he will be making an appearance next week!). Year 2 have been keeping sleep diaries this week, as they have learnt the importance of good sleep hygiene, thinking carefully about what it takes to have a healthy body and mind. They will need more rest than ever as they prepare for their return to school next week – we are all so looking forward to it. Year 3 have taken part in a virtual residential week, making pizzas, packing suitcases and building fairy houses. Year 4 children have enjoyed taking part in live English and Maths lessons, ready for their return next week. However, the highlight of the week has to be, without a doubt, the Junior School Sports Day. Whether taking place remotely, or in school, all pupils were expected to take part and put their sporting skills to the test. We even had parents getting involved with House chanting!

In the Senior School, The Opening Minds Lecture Series culminated this week with a lecture on the benefits of a good night’s sleep. All of the thought-provoking talks have been uploaded to our YouTube channel, and are well worth watching. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank students for all of the photography submissions that have come from our Remote Photography Club this term. It is fantastic to see students managing to get outside and come up with creative interpretations of our weekly themes. As our Remote Forder schedule draws to a close, Mr Gower will turn his attention to 2 July and Forder Thursday. All students will join the PE Department at 0900 for a morning workout, prepare a healthy lunch with the Catering team, and then choose three exciting 90 minute projects from options that will be available on Firefly. Mr Gower will send a letter out next week with further information.

Despite the challenges of physical distancing on our construction site, the new Junior School and STEM project is still on programme to open in April 2021. Children will have an opportunity to visit the site during the Michaelmas Term, subject to government guidance on distancing measures, and guided tours will be arranged for interested parents from the Lent Term 2021.

Thanks again for your continued support of all we are doing in those most unusual of circumstances. I was most grateful to so many of you for completing our survey on communications. We will be following this up and informing you of the steps we will be taking in response to your feedback.

In the meantime, I do hope you all have a very good weekend.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N P Hewlett', written in a cursive style.

Mr N P Hewlett
Headmaster