

Dear Parents,

It has been a real pleasure for me to be back in school these last couple of days and a personal highlight was being able to speak to some of our students around the school and feel the energy and enthusiasm of the place again. Just a few days away emphasises how much I enjoy and am grateful for the vibrancy of life at RGS. Thank you for all the messages of support that I have had and particular thanks goes to Tom Keenan, for so ably 'holding the fort' while I have been recovering.

Most importantly, I am pleased to report that there are no further cases of Covid-19 confirmed amongst our community since our last all-parent communication. So, I am delighted to focus on a variety of non-Covid-related matters. I hope that I have not tempted fate for us now that I have typed those words...

Summer 2021 exams

Following the experience of moving to Centre Assessed Grades for last Summer's exams I know that students in Year 11 and the Upper Sixth deserve clarity about what may happen next Summer. Some changes to content have already been published and we all hope that exams may go ahead, though there is still the possibility that these may be pushed back into July. An announcement about exams and contingency plans has already been made in Scotland and we anticipate further guidance about the position in England shortly. We will provide further update as soon as we know more.

Homework and working from home

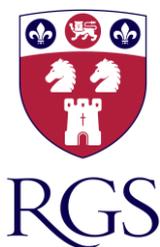
It is imperative that we all look after ourselves and aim to maintain a healthy balance between schoolwork and downtime – students and staff alike. While we have more to do to improve the reliability of the system, our switch to using Microsoft Teams has been a positive move. However, it does not mean that students should feel they can be using it at all hours, and they should certainly not feel they can be contacting each other and their teachers beyond what would be reasonable hours. Last year I asked staff not to respond to emails before 7am or after 7pm on school days and I think the same should apply to our use of Teams. It is really important that we allow each other to switch off and not expect people to be available 24/7.

By the same token, there should be no instance where a child is working late into the night if they have managed their workload sensibly. If you feel your son/daughter is not getting this right, then please do let someone in their pastoral team know so we can support them and ensure they are working sustainably. It is particularly important that we get this right in the younger years to establish good working habits that students can take forward. I should also note that there is no expectation that if a student is unwell that they need to be on top of their schoolwork. Please could you ensure that you guide your child here, reassuring them that rest and recuperation is the most important thing and that they will be supported to catch up once they are back in school and well-enough to do so.

Road safety around Brandling Park

We have been made aware that cars are repeatedly crossing the cycle lanes/mounting the pathways on Brandling Park, which is posing a significant risk to cyclists using the designated green cycle lane, as well as pedestrians on the walkway. I know that many students cycle and walk to school using this route (and thank you for using this 'greener' transport to school!) but I would like students to be especially careful in this area. For parents who drive to school using this route, I give a heartfelt plea to **NOT** drive on the cycle lane or walkway as it is both dangerous and illegal. I accept that this road is narrow but I'm afraid that we all just have to give way to oncoming traffic

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until it is safe to progress on the road. Thank you for your cooperation with this.

Virtual Open Morning

Our current parents will all likely remember the importance of attending Open Day events, when selecting schools for your children. Given the global pandemic (which I promised not to feature in this letter...) we are switching our usual event to a 'Virtual Open Morning' which will take place on **Saturday 14th November**. If you know of any contacts who are considering applying to RGS, then please do ask them to register for the event at <https://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk/virtual-open-morning>. I am also conscious that current parents often enjoy seeing the wide range of activities available on Open Morning, so we will send you links to some of the featured Virtual activities, nearer the time.

Race and Equality Working Group

Towards the end of the Summer term, I announced that we would be setting up a working party to look at our approach to race and equality. We have now confirmed the terms of reference of the project to take place over the course of this academic year and the staff involved are starting the process of exploring the issues. I recognise that we will need to consider a wide range of views and are likely to have to hear some uncomfortable truths. However, I think it is important that we engage with these issues, both to support individuals and to prepare all our students for modern society. We will be consulting the views of students and, as ever, I also value hearing from parents too both about areas of concern and about how we can continue to develop a positive culture at the RGS.

Vision and ethos

On a similar note, over the course of the last year I have been reflecting on the how the vision and ethos statement are articulated. I appreciate that this was developed after a significant amount of consultation and I particularly like how the ethos is based on the four pillars of inspiring a sense of belonging, a love for learning, a belief in each other and the ambition to succeed. However, I do want to review the overarching statement of purpose which currently reads "giving those around us the freedom to create their future." From my perspective this seems rather too laissez faire on the part of the school, in terms of what we should actively be trying to achieve, and I also think we can define a more purposeful purpose for the students too. I have already asked the question of students and had some interesting ideas fed back. I would much appreciate thoughts from parents on this too.

RGS heroes

I opened this letter mentioning how my temporary absence reminded me how much I appreciate the little things. With this in mind, I would like to highlight some of the, often unseen, aspects of the school, without which we simple could not operate. This week I wanted to shine a light on the unsung heroes of RGS, our amazing domestic and caretaking team. Everyone at RGS works hard but these colleagues have really risen to the challenge of implementing a wide range of new cleaning regimes, in order to keep our school as clean and safe as possible. Colleagues in this team are here when the sun rises and when the sun sets, every day of the week and they are key to keeping our community on site. Perhaps next time students or parents spot one of these RGS heroes (distinctive in their red or blue uniforms) they could say a quick 'thank you'. I know I for one am indebted to these members of our community for all that they do. In the meantime, I wish you a very pleasant weekend.

With all good wishes,

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