

Dear Parents,

I hope you are all well and have had a good week since my last communication – as I write this there is bright sunshine outside which makes a change from recent rain and the snow and ice that preceded it.

I am delighted to share with you that this week, as well as the continuation of remote learning, students in various year groups have participated in careers talks and wellbeing presentations delivered by outside speakers. We also held a virtual Y10 Parents' Conference and I hope that this allowed for some useful conversations. I am aware that some people experienced issues in the early part of the conference owing to an issue with our system provider and I am sorry for the frustration this will have caused. Where meetings could not take place, I have asked for teachers to be proactive in contacting parents if there are concerns to discuss.

Meanwhile, there are various updates that I want to share with you below. Some are more relevant to particular year groups but I think it is helpful for all parents to have an overview of what is happening.

Community engagement activities

Last week, we rolled out some new initiatives and challenges for both you and your children to enjoy. I especially wanted to thank parents for their warm response to the 'Parent Playlist', which clearly inspired parents to think about their feelgood tracks. Your recommendations have all been pulled together [here](#); please keep the ideas coming, contributing to our community's positivity and motivation. This week, Mr Miller has set your children a DJ competition, the details of which have been posted on the Student Hub and students will also find the details of this week's House cycling challenge on the Hub. Well done to those students who took part in last week's House running challenge and to Stowell who came out victorious. These activities are meant to be enjoyable for your children, allowing them to feel connected while helping their Houses earn those all-important points.

Student survey

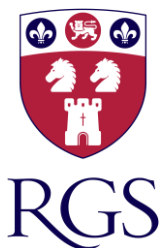
Parents might be aware that we sent student surveys to every year group in the Senior School last week, which revealed some helpful feedback both about how students are feeling and also how they are finding remote working. In addition, we are looking closely at our own data on the use of Teams, which gives us helpful feedback where students are finding it difficult to engage and we are following this up individually.

Interestingly, the picture seems to be that students across all year groups are feeling that there is too much live teaching, leaving insufficient time for them to complete tasks within allotted time. We are keeping this under review to ensure that we have the balance and pace of work right; we are keen that students fully cover course content and are adequately challenged, without feeling overwhelmed. There are, of course, some students who either feel they are coping fine with the volume of work or would prefer even more. We aim to continue providing relevant extension or stretch and challenge work for these students, albeit every student should also have quality time away from the screen, exercising and doing something for the sole purpose of having fun.

Public examinations

Following the cancellation of public exams, Ofqual have recently launched their consultation on how grades should be given in the summer and we will be providing a response as a school. However, parents and pupils are also invited to submit their views and the consultation document can be found [here](#).

Royal Grammar School, Eskdale Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne NE2 4DX
T: 0191 281 5711 E: communications@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk



There are sixty questions being consulted on covering a range of topics from the standard for achieving grades, the timing and form of assessment, the process for determining and moderating grades as well as the system for appeals. Much of this will place a significantly greater than normal burden on teachers and the school though, following our experience last year we had already been making sure that we were capturing robust evidence in case it should be needed. In all of this we want to ensure that we fairly represent the efforts and abilities of our pupils. However, it is worth noting that in a normal year, grades are determined by examiners and exam boards take responsibility for any appeals. In 2020, the algorithm being discredited and the consequent reversion to centre assessed grades placed schools at the heart of the appeal process. This year it will be important for exam boards properly to moderate the evidence that schools put forward in support of their grade recommendations and also take responsibility for any appeals that are made. In the absence of such a process of standardisation there is likely to be significant grade inflation that will devalue the efforts that so many young people across the country have been making.

Even before we know the outcome of the consultation it is worth raising the practical point that assessment is likely to go on well into the summer term and exam year groups are unlikely to go on exam leave as early as they would in a normal year. I hope it also goes without saying again that students need to keep working to provide teachers evidence of their work on which they can base grade recommendations. You will be aware that our original plan was to have internal exams for Y13 and Y11 students commencing straight after half term. With lockdown and in the knowledge that students will not be back in school until the end of half term at the earliest, we have decided to push the exams back a week to allow students to have time with teachers in classrooms, to go through some revision and to seek advice. Therefore, we now plan that Y13 exams will start on Monday 1st March (and finish on Friday 5th) and Y11 exams will start on Monday 8th March (and finish on Tuesday 16th). Clearly, any extension of lockdown will mean that we will need to revisit these timings and we will advise on that in due course.

Mass testing

Following the launch of Covid-19 testing at the start of this term, we are currently putting plans into place to scale this up if and when students return to the School after half term. In line with current guidance, we anticipate offering tests to Senior School students twice on their return and weekly for staff thereafter, but the Government has withdrawn plans to test students daily if they become close contacts of positive Covid-19 cases. We realise that this is a huge operation and will aim to keep disruption to the normal school day to a minimum when it happens. We will also continue to implement all previous safety measures as mass testing is merely an extra tool in our efforts to keep the community safe.

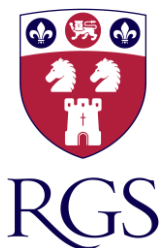
Critical Workers childcare requests

There was a large number of students in school this week. While we will always endeavour to be as accommodating as possible to your needs and appreciate that a high proportion of our parents are critical workers, please can I request that children are only sent into school when it is necessary. On that note, thank you to those parents who have been contacting us when a change in circumstances means their children are no longer required to be in school.

Pastoral matters

We have received a useful leaflet from Northumbria Police offering advice to parents and carers around the issue of County Lines. We wanted to share this with you and you will find it [here](#).

We have also been informed by Public Health England that, despite the lockdown, it is critical that the immunisation programme continues for meningitis, tetanus and polio and HPV. In the first instance Y9 parents have been contacted regarding the logistics of bringing this whole year group into school safely during the lockdown. Please rest assured this will be managed following strict social distancing and in line with Covid-19



safety procedures to protect our whole community.

Admissions update

In the coming week we will also be carrying out admissions testing for year 7. Those of you who remember bringing your children for a mass event in previous years should be reassured that we will be conducting this in small groups spread over the course of the week and appropriately socially distanced as well as being in an area of the school separate from any other activity. We anticipate putting in place similar arrangements for Y3 assessments after half term. In doing so we are building the RGS community of the future. I am looking forward to meeting the range of candidates and I hope that they are equally excited about the prospect of joining the school.

In the meantime, I wish you all the best for the coming weekend.

Geoffrey Stanford
Headmaster