

Dear Parents,

As ever, I hope this finds you well.

I try not to overload your e-mail by writing too regularly but there are a number of things both in and outside school this week that I should update on and I have taken the opportunity to include links to a number of other topics at the same time, again with the intention of reducing the number of e-mails sent out by the school.

Continuation of remote learning after half term

The major news of the week for schools was the Prime Minister's announcement on Wednesday regarding the return of students back into school. We were disappointed to learn that our students will not now be returning in the week immediately after the February half term with the new earliest target date being set as March 8th. I understand why the Government have had to take this decision and it was not unexpected but it is frustrating nonetheless as we know that teachers and students are all waiting for the moment they can get back in to school to start the journey back to normality. As you would expect we have already adapted our planning and remote learning work and development will continue at pace through this extended period to ensure that our students stay on target and maintain their learning journey through school. I met with our Heads of academic departments this week, and they are happy that progress remains encouraging.

Public and Internal Exams

Last week I wrote about the Ofqual consultation about the cancellation of public exams in the UK and I submitted a response on behalf of the school this week. I should clarify that, at the moment, we understand that exams in IGCSE subjects, Pre-U History and the International A level in Geography are all still expected to go ahead. We are looking carefully at the issues caused by these running in parallel with subjects where Teacher Assessed Grades will be used.

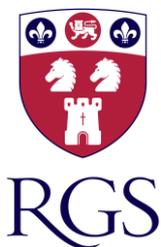
Meanwhile, the Government's recent announcement that schools will not return before the 8th March clearly affects our plans for Year 11 and Year 13 internal exams. Instead of starting the exams on 1st March we will now start them on the 8th March for Year 13 and the 15th March for Year 11. Even though still remotely, the two weeks after half term will be an opportunity for students to seek advice and support from teachers and we will not be expecting them to be doing homework other than revision at this stage. Clearly any further changes to lockdown will have to be borne in mind and we are putting in place plans for remote assessments if needed.

Year 13 parents will remember that Mrs McGough wrote to you in the Autumn Term explaining that we usually report a predicted grade in U6 reports to give parents and students an idea of what teachers believe would be the likely examination performance at the end of the course based on student progress to date. Since we are no longer in an externally marked, terminal examination-based system, it would be inappropriate to continue this practice this term. We have therefore decided to revert to the practice used lower down the school (and in Year 12) of reporting attainment in that reporting period instead. Meanwhile Year 11 have a parents conference coming up where you will be able to discuss current attainment as well as suitability for continuing subjects for Sixth Form.

Children's Mental Health Week and other pastoral matters

On the pastoral front, next week is Children's Mental Health Week and we have a range of activities taking place during form times with some super resources being put together to support our community. The theme for this year is *Express Yourself*, where

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children are being encouraged to think about finding a creative outlet to help manage their mental health or to use as a healthy way to express their feelings and emotions. We are encouraging students to share with our community via the Student Hub examples of what creative outlets they use – for example, art, drama, music, creative writing, dance, song, knitting, crafting, sculpting...the list goes on. We are also encouraging staff to role-model what they do and we would encourage parents to do the same where they can. We would welcome any examples of you and your household using creative outlets to support your wellbeing – please do share them with us via communications@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk.

A reminder that amendments to a range of policies affected by Covid-19 have been collated into one Covid-19 Policy Amendments document. Notably, this includes areas of safeguarding, e-safety, and staff and student behaviour policies, for example. It is a “live” document, so responsive to the changing environment we find ourselves in, and we will endeavour to keep it up to date for you to access should you need to. It can be accessed [here](#) on our website, along with the risk assessments.

Meanwhile, Sarah Longville, Deputy Head Pastoral, has also produced an amalgamation of resources, around the topic of E-Safety, which parents may find useful and can be accessed [here](#) on the website.

Home learning environment

It is perhaps worth mentioned that there has been an observation, mainly for the older Year groups, that some students are not creating the best environment at home to support their learning with too many tempting distractions at close hand, such as gaming devices or TVs. Others perhaps have not got the balance right between finding a space that is quiet enough while not so private that they cannot be supervised. We continue to ask students to switch their cameras on to help facilitate better interaction between the students and the teachers and allow the teacher to ensure the students are engaged with their learning. It would be helpful if parents could have a conversation this weekend with their child, to reflect on their child’s learning environment at home and to ensure that it is conducive to focus, engagement, self-discipline and learning. Thank you so much!

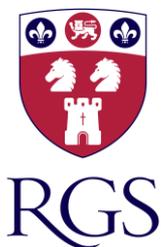
Pupil feedback

Notwithstanding the above, I am pleased to report that it has been another very busy week of school activity in which we have continued adapting our practice and reflecting on the feedback from students about their experience of remote learning, based upon the school wide student survey we did at the end of last week. We know they are finding it tough and particularly amongst the older students in the school. Mr Keenan and I also meet with the Senior Prefects and the School Council each week and these meetings also provide helpful feedback so, if your child does have any suggestions for improvement, please suggest that they make contact with someone from these groups, though they are equally welcome to make contact directly.

Initiatives that have been working well are the increased use of virtual breakout rooms in Microsoft Teams, which allow the students to discuss aspects of lessons in smaller groups with the teacher moving between those rooms, giving the students the opportunity to interact together like they are used to doing in school.

Engagement in co-curricular activities and house challenges

Away from normal lessons it has been fantastic to see the students taking active part in the House competitions we have been running and, in case you are not aware, a good number of co-curricular activities are up and running. Examples over the last week that have been appreciated include: Football, Hockey, Netball and Rugby training as well as Gymnastics and Fitness Clubs, while the musicians are busy preparing for the Spring Term recital. Duke of Edinburgh and CCF training continue and the CCF have a visiting RAF Officer speaking on Friday 5th February. Meanwhile, our subject support clinics are running and a parent who has been working on the Covid-19 vaccine also kindly gave a



talk to our scientists this week. Please do encourage your children to look beyond their normal lesson activity and get involved.

The House activities in particular are often competitions where the score is dependant on the number of students submitting entries. These typically only involve technology in a limited fashion (more details follow on this). We all know it is so important for the children to spend quality time away from their screens. Last week's House Challenge was an attempt to complete the Tour de France. Well done to Eldon who took first place this time. All the details of this week's House challenge have been posted on the Student Hub and can also be found [here](#).

We have already received some excellent entries, from students in both the Junior and Senior School, for Mr Miller's DJ Competition. There is still time to for your child to enter and details can be found [here](#). I have also been asked to share the [Parent Playlist link](#) once more and remind you that you are still able to contribute your choices to the list.

Finally, a new House Drama challenge has also been set up, the details of which can be found [here](#). This ties in with the creative theme for this year's Children's Mental Health Week.

Half term activities

With the February half term now less than two weeks away, we have been contacted by a couple of organisations who will be holding creative workshops for students throughout the break. Many students will just need a rest but, for those that are interested, these offers can be found [here](#). I must point out that some of them will require registration in advance of the half term break.

I have no doubt that this continues to be a very challenging time for all families so I would like to thank you all once more for all the support you show the school and its staff.

Wishing you all the best for the weekend,

Geoffrey Stanford
Headmaster