



From the Headmaster - May 2020

Dear Parents

This time last week the country celebrated the 75th anniversary of VE Day, and it was a pleasure to enjoy a collective experience for once not based around the pandemic, as we remembered those who gave so much for us. It is hard to avoid a direct comparison with all those key workers doing so much for the country right now, whether they be supermarket workers, bin collectors, delivery drivers, care workers or NHS staff. I hope that in years to come, their dedication and sacrifice will be remembered and marked just as significantly. As we look forward to some warmer weather and a little easing of lockdown restrictions, we can perhaps just about start to see a way forward through what has been a difficult and challenging time for us all. However, there is still much to do before life returns to any semblance of normality, and we would do well to bear in mind the words of Winston Churchill in his VE Day address 75 years ago: "We may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not forget for a moment the toils and efforts that lie ahead."

Phased return to school

As part of national social distancing measures to limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), we have had to limit the numbers of children and young people attending school to ensure that pupils and staff attending could do so safely. However, after the Prime Minister's announcement at the start of this week and the subsequent guidance produced by the Department for Education, we have been asked to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of our Year 10 and Year 12 students from the week commencing 1 June 2020 at the earliest.

These year groups have been prioritised by the government because they are preparing for key examinations next year, and are most at risk of falling behind. Whilst no details have been finalised, it is important to note at the outset that this will not be a return to normal timetables nor will pupils back in school full time, rather some support will be available to supplement pupils' remote education. Indeed, we are required to limit the attendance to small groups at a time so it is likely that we will only have some members of each year group in at a time in 'subject clusters'. When we have worked out the detail and we are satisfied that our plans are safe for all concerned we will let you know as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, we will be encouraging selected pupils to attend (where there are no shielding concerns for the pupils themselves or their households), so that they can gain the educational and wellbeing benefits of physically being at school. Obviously, staff and pupils should not attend if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household.

We will of course be putting protective measures in place for staff and pupils, as far as is possible, to ensure that the risk of transmission of COVID 19 is reduced. These will include:

- carrying out detailed risk assessments before opening to more children pupils
- promoting regular hand washing for 20 seconds with running water and soap throughout the day
- ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the catch it, bin it, kill it approach
- cleaning more frequently to remove the virus on frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, tabletops, etc.
- minimising contact and reducing mixing between groups of pupils
- operating a one-way system around the school
- asking everyone to practise social distancing.

Transport

The government are encouraging pupils to walk or cycle to school where possible and avoid public transport. The government has indicated that they will publish guidance on how to travel safely, which should include transport to school. Many of the coach companies have informed us that they will not be able to offer a transport service until September and we are aware that a number of pupils may not be able to travel to school because of this; they should continue with the work set remotely.

Arrangements for pupils not coming in to school

It is increasingly unlikely that most pupils in Years 7- 9 will return to school this academic year and indeed the prospect of seeing Years 10 and Year 12 is dependent upon the rate of COVID-19 infection across the country as well as practicalities for families. It is therefore important that we continue to evolve the learning arrangements for pupils not coming in to school. I know that most pupils have adapted to using ShowMyHomework (SMHW) as a learning platform and that teachers are doing their very best to set work that will ensure that students can continue to learn effectively and make progress at home, but this method will never be as effective as a lesson that takes place in a classroom. Therefore, we are attempting to continue to develop our use of Microsoft Teams (Teams) and supplement work set on SMHW with some online sessions supported and led by teaching staff. However, it has become apparent from our work with Year 12, is that live sessions must support the learning of students alongside the independent work being set. Evidence from research regarding online learning suggests that developing a

structured and "blended approach" rather than simply replicating classroom time and activities is one that has maximum efficacy. Indeed, the quality of the work and how it is structured to promote learning is more important than the frequency of interaction. Additionally, a reminder that we are endeavouring to act in the best interests of all stakeholders and this has to include teachers as well as pupils. Year 12 are currently having one online experience each week in each subject and after half-term we will begin phasing in online interactions for some pupils in Key Stage 3. Further details will be given at the end of this month.

We will continue to use SMHW for teachers to set work for each normal timetabled lesson that a pupil would have if they were able to attend school. Pupils are able to continue to interact with their teachers and ask questions through SMHW and via email.

Staying safe online

A reminder that there is considerable support available to keep children and young people safe online. As well as links that have previously been listed:

- [Thinkyouknow](#) (advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online)
- [Internet matters](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [Parent info](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [LGfL](#) (support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online)
- [Net-aware](#) (support for parents and careers from the NSPCC)

further useful sources of information are:

- [Childline](#)
- [BritishCouncil](#)

Arrangements for pupils coming in to School (children of Critical Workers and vulnerable children)

The School continues to be open for children of Critical Workers and vulnerable children. We have already sent an email to all parents who have previously indicated that they may require this provision over the May Half-term. If your circumstances have changed or you have any queries in relation to this, please email Dave Dempsey: dd@strs.org.uk.

Mental Health, well-being and safeguarding

A reminder that there is a CAMHS helpline available for children, young people and families who may require support and advice from the NHS: Telephone 01452 894300 (9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Friday). Additionally, TiC+ counselling services can offer counselling remotely and details of how this is available is on their website www.ticplus.org.uk. I have also attached a resource pack produced by our Mental Health Support Team for teenagers on coping with anxiety associated with COVID-19.

If you have a safeguarding concern, you can email DSL@strs.org.uk.

Heads of Key Stage are also available to support pupils:

- Rhys Davies (Assistant Head i/c Key Stage 3) rmd@strs.org.uk
- Peter Daniel (Head of Upper School) pmd@strs.org.uk
- Matt Lynch (Head of Sixth Form) mtl@strs.org.uk

Please do not hesitate to contact the school if you are facing significant challenges or are in need of additional support.

We can only respond to advice from the Government and Public Health England as we receive it, and as we find ourselves in what feels like an endless loop of official briefings and guidance followed by debate and anxiety, it can sometimes feel as if our 'real' lives are permanently on hold. But it is important to remind ourselves that this is not the case; we can as a School continue to pull together as a community, to check in on each other, to keep working, keep creating and learning and questioning, and to keep looking forward to and planning for a time when we can return to, if not normality, then something approaching it. I would like to leave you with some wise words from 19th century American essayist and philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson: "What lies behind you and what lies in front of you, pales in comparison to what lies inside of you."

Garde Ta Foy.

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