

10<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Dear Parents

We have had a fantastic return to school this week. After two staff training days on Thursday and Friday of last week, it has been a joy to see all our pupils back in school. And even more joyous has been to see them moving around school more freely, after the restrictions of last year. In the Senior School teachers have been reclaiming their classrooms and teaching spaces – last year we were all nomads moving from room to room, whilst students remained in place! The result of this was unloved rooms which had little identity, as staff rushed off to the next lesson and we all hauled boxes, bags and textbooks across the site! This week it has seemed that every room I have been into has new displays and organisation as they very firmly become English, History or Maths rooms again!

Our new Year 7 pupils have also been a joy, finding their way around school and being so enthusiastic about their learning. And of course there are classrooms which Year 8 had never been into until this week so they too have been explorers. The Infants have been into the Dining Hall for the first time – even Year 3 were in Reception the last time they ate there. I watched Year 3 balancing their trays very carefully on Monday!

On Wednesday afternoon I had the pleasure of leading the first whole Senior School Reading in the Liddiard Theatre since 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020. That was the day that we shut the doors of school and Mrs Walker and I had hurriedly organised a Celebration Reading to finish the term. This was the slide that I finished that Reading with – and it was also the slide that I used to open the one that I led on Wednesday:



The theme of my Reading this week was Community and I asked all our students to actively work to re-build the sense of community that is so much a part of our school. I have been really heartened to see it in action this week – one of my highlights of the week has been Mrs Crosby asking me to thank our Year 10 and Year 11 students for their polite and courteous behaviour as they have stepped aside carefully for Reception children walking to lunch and made sure that other students have done the same. Such small gestures are what build community spirit.

Whilst my theme is community could I again ask for your support with courteous parking and driving around our school? We are part of our local community and, sadly, I have had reports from our neighbours this week of poor parking and even some rudeness towards them. In

particular, now that Year 7 have completed their first full week of school, could I ask that parents avoid driving down Polam Road and instead drop children further down Grange Road? Thank you.

Mr Robson has been as busy as ever organising careers events – this time for Year 11 who missed a number of their college taster days and talks in the Summer Term. Over the next few weeks students will be hearing from all the main local providers, as follows:

MONDAY 20 SEPTEMBER: QE Sixth Form College taster sessions and talk (all day event at QE)

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER: Middlesbrough College talk 8.:30 - 9.00am

WEDNESDAY 22 SEPTEMBER: Ask Apprenticeships talk 8.30 - 9.00am

THURSDAY 23 SEPTEMBER: Darlington College talk 8.30 - 9.00am

WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER: Northern School of Art talk 8.30 – 9.00am

Students will then have their individual independent careers interviews, which will take place up until Christmas. The majority of our Year 11 students move onto Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, hence the longer session from them. We are still gathering final destinations and subjects from last year's cohort, but I am very pleased to say that all have college places or apprenticeships and over half have transferred to QE.

At the other end of school, it has been lovely to see how well Junior School children (including our new Reception children) have settled into the new routines in school. The learning I have seen this week has been very purposeful. There have also been some very significant changes to the Junior School playground, with a new trim trail up in the bark area, Amelia's garden decorated, new maps and other outdoor learning posters on the walls of Elm Grove and a much expanded playground area! We have had a number of new paths put in over the summer and have also had old paths tarmacked. I hope all parents have noticed the new path around the edge of the main car park which I think is a real improvement for the safety of pedestrians. Along with this work we have expanded the area of hard standing in the Junior School playground, which will be wonderful when the winter weather comes and children can no longer be on the grass. I asked a number of Year 6 pupils what they thought of it when I was on duty on Thursday and they were very pleased to have more space to play!

I have a couple of messages from teaching staff this week. Mrs Elsdon has asked me to pass this message onto Year 2: *I am so impressed with how 2E Ceres have settled into the routines for Year 2. You have all worked so hard this week and I have enjoyed getting to know you all! Have a lovely weekend. Mrs Elsdon*

Mrs Mawson has asked sent me the following report about her class: *Year 3/4M Mars have settled well into the new school year and routines. They've had their first activities session this afternoon drawing and painting autumnal leaves using watercolours. As you can see we have some budding artists in our form! Have a lovely weekend everyone, Mrs Mawson*

Mrs Squires has asked me to remind all parents that every Senior School student should have a reading book with them for DEAR Time each day – that's **Drop Everything And Read!** She also



asked me to thank all those parents who have requested book recommendations – she will send out age-related reading lists next week

Miss. Spence, Miss .Franks and Mrs Crosby have asked me to say how proud they are of each one of their new Reception children who have progressed and become more confident this week: *we are thrilled to see how happy and settled they are. We are looking forward to the exciting learning journey we will take together.*

And Mrs Johnson has sent me a report about the work that her class are doing in Humanities this week: *In Humanities this term we have a History focus and Year3/4 Venus have enjoyed worked together as a new class. They have researched the 3 different periods of the Stone Age: Paleolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic. They wrote as a group their findings on the stones of Stonehenge, before recording the most interesting facts in their book.*



And so the first week back is over and we are into the swing of the new school year! There is a virtual event for Year 11 parents next week – our annual ‘Supporting your child through GCSE’ event. This takes place on Thursday evening and Mr Rees sent the Zoom link in his letter to all Year 11 parents earlier this week. We will send a reminder next week. Year 10 parents - there is an ‘introduction to GCSE’ event for you which is calendared for the start of October. I hope that many of our Year 11 parents are able to be there on Thursday as we will be discussing the Raising Achievement Plan, how you can best support your son or daughter in English, Maths and Science as well as an overview of the year and the careers guidance that will be available.

I hope you and your family have a relaxing weekend – we look forward to another busy week!

Best wishes

Kate Reid