

11th September 2020

Dear Parents

Welcome to the first newsletter of this academic year. This first full week back for pupils and staff has been incredibly busy, but we have been hugely impressed by the positive start that has been made by all. A great deal of planning went into the full return and we were always aware that we would need to tweak and amend those plans once we had all 750 pupils back together. In fact, most of it has run very smoothly, with just a few tweaks needed to make sure that everything does! The Senior Leadership Team have met tonight to make those changes which will be communicated to staff and to parents at the start of next week. The main challenges have inevitably been lunches – feeding all of the different ‘bubbles’ without allowing them to mix and with all of the additional cleaning that has to take place has not been easy and I would personally like to thank all of the Catering staff for the sterling job that they have done this week. There will be some changes next week to ensure that all Senior School cohorts have enough time to eat and to be outside, as well as ensuring that Junior lunches run a little more smoothly than at the start of the week.

The other area which we knew would be complicated – and has proved so - is pick up at the end of the day. Again, we’ll make some changes to try and make waiting and collecting your children easier. These will be communicated to you in a letter at the start of next week.

We have had quite a number of complaints from local residents this week. Some have been about parking and inconsiderate driving, but most have been concerns about social distancing, particularly among parents who are waiting or picking up on Polam Road. Please could I ask again that all our parents take these concerns into account – please don’t sit on residents’ walls for example. Everyone is more anxious at the moment and we do try to be a considerate neighbour.

Thank you all for your constructive suggestions and for the support that you have given to the school and teaching staff – it has been a long week and the positive comments and thanks have certainly kept us going!

In this first newsletter of the school year I usually report on the examination results during the summer and today is no exception. We are incredibly proud of last year’s Year 11 and Year 13 students who had their final year disrupted so abruptly and who were hugely resilient in their responses. They have still been unable to mark the usual milestones of the end of school – we have had no Year 11 Prom or Year 13 Leavers’ Dinner and it does not look as though we will be able to do so in the near future, given the new restrictions.

Nevertheless, despite all of this, results continue to rise. Our final Year 13 cohort achieved an average A Level grade of a B+ and all of them were able to continue to their first choice of university. We had a lovely time celebrating with them on results day – only having nine students meant that they could actually come into school to collect their results.

At GCSE we have also continued to improve results. Our Attainment 8 score for this year – the score which measures how students have achieved over 8 GCSEs – was 53.1. This is an

increase on last year when students achieved 48.57. To put this into context, the national Average Attainment 8 figure for 2019 was 46.7. I am very proud of our students, but also of our excellent staff and the work that we have done together to achieve the continued improvement of our school. We know that Polam will continue to go from strength to strength and we are continually working to refine and develop what we do in the classroom to ensure the best outcomes for every single one of our pupils.

Sadly, we couldn't have a traditional results day for Year 11, but each student was emailed their results and then had an individual interview in the afternoon so that we could support them with their next steps. As usual, the majority of them are heading to QE Sixth Form College and I have had some lovely communications from them and their parents about their first few days! We wish them the best of luck – we know they will be amazing!

So, what have we been up to this week in school? Well, apart from getting used to the hand sanitiser and new 'bubbles' there has also been a lot of work! Our new Year 11s have extra Catch Up time in their day and I have been very impressed by their hard work this week. Most of them had already come to Summer School in August and so have started to really focus on what they need to do this year in order to achieve their goals. We also held a very well attended Year 11 GCSE Parent Information Evening via Zoom last night – thanks to all who came.

Mr Turnbull has sent me some pictures of the first Junior School CC Activities session of the term, with KS2 today. The children discussed where the water in our taps come from and were challenged to design a pipe system. They also discussed the best gradient to use and gravitational potential energy!



Miss Barrass has asked me to say a huge well done to Caitlin Moffatt (6 Juno) and Martha Taylor (6 Jupiter) as she has awarded them PROUD work for some amazing work in history this week. She tells me that is was very neat and tidy a lovely example of our expectations here at Polam!

Mrs Elsdon and Mrs Mawson have also sent me a few lines about their new Year 2 classes: *It has been lovely to have all the Year 2 children back together again this week. The children have settled smoothly back into school life and taken the new safety rules in their stride - a huge well done. The children have begun their learning with enthusiasm and a brilliant attitude, we are very proud of you all!*

I had the pleasure of finally awarding Prefect ties and badges to our new Year 11 student leadership team in Year 11 Reading this morning (sadly we cannot have the whole school together at present so Reading has to take place for one ‘bubble’ at a time). These students were appointed just before lockdown, but had not had formal recognition. They are:

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| Head Students | Alfreda Batty Tibet Homraruen |
| School Prefects | Emily Bowman Matthew Dove Ellie Ferguson Rosie McElvanney Jessica Nunn Courtney Shepperson Maya Watson |

Well done to them all! We did not get the chance to complete the process of appointing House, Sports and Music Captains before school closed and so we have invited Year 11 students to apply next week so that we can do so. I look forward to reading application letters!

I am sure that next week will continue to be busy – it has been genuinely lovely to walk around school and hear the noise of classroom chatter this week. We will continue to slowly resume our normal activities, taking our time and assessing the risks as we do so.

Thank you all for your support – I hope you and your children have a pleasant weekend

Best wishes

Kate Reid