



Re-founded 1555

# Ripon Grammar School

*Helping shape the future since 1555*



14 July 2020

Dear Parents

This has been an end of term like no other. Rather than a period of excitement and anticipation for the summer holidays mixed with a celebration of school life through speech day and commemoration in the cathedral [which has never before been cancelled in its history] we seem to be ebbing towards Friday with the last face to face sessions for our Years 10 and 12s in attendance. Thoughts inevitably will start to turn towards September and it is with this purpose that I am communicating with you today.

## **Staffing and Strategic Changes**

First I would like to update you on the changes for September which would occur in any normal school year. In terms of staff changes we have already said goodbye to Mrs Etherington and Ms Sutcliffe earlier this term and will be also saying to goodbye at the end of this term to Mr Chamberlain, Dr Linklater, Mrs Addis and Mrs Johnson. We wish the departing staff all the very best for their new careers and futures and thank them for the years of service to the school. We will be welcoming the following new staff in September: Mrs Day [Assistant Head Boarding], Mrs Roy [Inclusion and SEN] Mrs Pang and Mr Hamill [Mathematics], Dr Martino and Mrs Shiells [Deputy Senior House Parents], Mr Shahi [School Health Worker from March 2021], Mrs Colville-Robins [Head of Geography - maternity] and Mrs Harrison [Head of MFL]. The following current staff will also have new responsibilities: Miss Ball [Deputy Head of Upper School] and Mrs Gallagher [acting Head of Biology].

In September we will also have a new catering company – CH & Co- who are busy developing new exciting menus and will be investing in the current serving area of the dining hall and a new serving facility in the sixth form centre. From September our new uniform list and regulations will also operate and full details can be found on the website: <http://www.ripongrammar.co.uk/parent-info/school-uniform/>.

## **Operational Changes in light of Covid-19**

I will now turn to our planning and expectations for September. We are currently guided by the latest gov.uk advice published on 2 July. This guidance may be subject to change so any planning and the information I am sharing now could be subject to change and adaptation. As you may imagine we are building some of the core aspects now but much of the finer detail will be decided upon towards the end of August and early September and I will look to update all parents then. Inevitably there will be a range of questions you might have but I would ask for your forbearance and trust that the school will try to make the best decision for your child's education and so therefore the detail here is only provisional.

The two core principles of the latest guidance is a requirement that first, schools, as far as possible, create groupings [likely to be whole year groups] within the school and seek ways to reduce mixing

between groupings. This is largely to ensure that the 'test and trace' system can be operated effectively. The second principle is to try to keep the curriculum as broad and balanced as possible. These two principles are not necessarily completely compatible since a rigorous zoning of year groups would also prevent access by students to specialist teaching areas. What we will be trying to do is to combine, as best we can, those 2 principles, in addition to all the current advice about social distancing, cleaning and hygiene etc.

### **Timetable & Curriculum**

We have planned a new timetable which will 'zone' year groups in parts of the school for the majority of their lessons. However this timetable is not a complete 'lockdown' of students and does allow some movement to practical lessons such as science, art, music and DT in order to keep the curriculum broad and balanced. We do not envisage any narrowing of the curriculum for any year groups at this stage. This remains our commitment to keep the curriculum broad and also reflects our local context and ability cohort.

In order to keep the year groups as separate as possible we will look closely at lesson changeovers where there might be increased footfall and plan carefully for holding areas and one way systems if required. Lunch and break will be staggered between Years 7-9, 10-11 with the sixth form using the sixth form centre as much as possible. However it is intended that we will offer the full break and lunch catering menus in the dining hall but will make adaptations to queuing and seating areas.

As you might appreciate there are a lot of more specific logistics around form time, assemblies, locker use and changing for PE to give a few examples but this guidance will be made clear at the start of September including the school's risk assessment. We do know that sport and music will be effected with current guidance not allowing contact sport for example. There will also be more information about school transport when the detail becomes clear.

### **Assessment and Progress**

We are all aware that lockdown has posed its challenges for many. For some this has been technical, for others managing work volumes, while for others a sense of isolation and loss of purpose. This has also affected staff too. While there has been plenty of work set by the school during this period no doubt completion rates may have varied and many students may feel behind. Inevitably therefore there will be a strong desire to assess what our students know and have or have not learnt.

It is important to recognise that, while this is a national situation, many of our students are in a good position and have worked extremely hard. For that they are to be congratulated. The one to one sessions for Year 10 and 12 have helped address this issue to some extent with our exam classes next year. We also know that it is likely that there will be some changes to GCSE and A level assessment to help, though this is at consultation stage at present. It is possible that some content will be removed in some areas and some practical requirements removed as well as a possible extension to the teaching period by moving GCSEs and A Levels back a week or two. This will be positively received and will be communicated once the decision by Ofqual has been made.

I think it is imperative for the need to adopt a positive, self-fulfilling, view that students will bounce back and recover quickly if their education is uninterrupted from September onwards. For this reason we have decided not to change our assessment framework for students for next year. We balanced the pros and cons of, for example, holding additional formal assessments for Year 11 and 13 in the autumn term but felt the time would be better utilised covering content. However departments will be, naturally, running in-lesson diagnostic assessments during the autumn term

after week one and students will be informed of what to learn in September in the usual way a class might be reminded about a test coming up. These are not 'be all and end all tests' but a means to assess progress and adapt teaching. The summer break should be seen as that, and while I would not argue against students in, for example, Years 9 and upwards checking over their notes or catching up with work missed from this term, I would also urge them to consider the importance of being refreshed and ready in September.

### **Pastoral Matters**

We are aware that students returning to school in September may experience some anxiety following on from the Covid-19 lockdown. Pastoral and PSHCE sessions will focus on mental health and well-being in the autumn term. Staff trained as 'Mental Health and Well-being Champions' are working with a team of sixth form students who are committed to promoting the importance of mental health and emotional well-being amongst the student body. The School Health Worker and the Healthy Child Team are available to offer support to students and are able to refer to partner services when additional help is required. If you wish to contact school about your child's emotional health and well-being, please do not hesitate to do so. Miss Murray, Deputy Head Pastoral, Mr Fell Head of Sixth Form, and the Heads of Year are available via email or telephone to arrange a conversation.

The pastoral teams have undertaken a huge amount of work to support our students over the lockdown. We will be looking closely at identifying those students who have slipped behind during this period or who have faced some mental health and wellbeing challenges with a view to effective recognition and support from September onwards. We await whether any catch up/tutoring financial assistance will be forthcoming from the government to support this.

### **Attendance and expectations**

Government guidance is clear that all students are expected in school from September though, as stated, we understand that there may be anxiety about returning to school. However current guidance is clear that absence will only be authorised for sickness and/or suspected C-19 symptoms. If a student does fall ill we will isolate that individual in the first instance and then advise on testing and self-isolation as per the government guidance. We would then respond to the necessary arrangements in terms of 'test and trace' and activate any additional measures on the advice of Public Health England. For those isolating we would look to continue home learning for those affected.

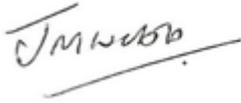
### **Online Learning**

There is no doubt that online learning has raised many challenges but also opened up many possibilities. We will be reflecting on the how we can utilise online learning more widely from September to support 'normal' teaching in any 'normal' year. For many the challenges of online learning have tested their powers of organisation and motivation. For many there will be some key lessons and skills to take away from this. No doubt some have relished the opportunity while others have found it a challenge. It is important to bear in mind that all subject areas have been able to keep up with the trajectory of their syllabus delivery irrespective of whether students have been in school or not. That is not to say that there are no gaps in knowledge and understanding but it is as well to remind ourselves of this important message.

Finally I would like to record my thanks to the hard work and dedication of the RGS staff who have worked to keep the momentum going to the end of term.

I wish all members of the wider RGS community a restful, healthy and happy summer break and remain optimistic about our return to a degree of normality in September.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J M Webb', with a horizontal line underneath.

**Jonathan M Webb**  
**Headmaster**