



Watford Grammar School for Boys

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Headmaster: Mr I Cooksey MA (Oxon) MA (Lond)

18th March 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

It is wonderful to be back! The School is alive once more and we are delighted to be able to reunite as a community. The return to school was also incredibly smooth. The mass testing operation was a remarkable achievement, with over 4000 lateral flow tests conducted in just 6 days, with the invaluable support of parental volunteers and staff from the School. The sports hall was temporarily transformed into a 'field hospital' by our magnificent site team and the whole setup was slick and impressive. It does leave me wondering what the government will ask of us next though – having turned our hand to healthcare, will we be asked next to start negotiating trade deals or leading a small invasion force somewhere? The mind boggles...

I am enormously grateful to everyone who made this enterprise such a success and I am very pleased to report that we didn't record a single positive case across the two weeks. With over 94% of the students with consent to test, this should give a good level of reassurance to parents, students and staff, although we should always be mindful of the possibility of 'false negative' results and the potential for subsequent infections. It is for this reason that students and staff are now being asked to test from home.

Testing at Home

All boys who have completed three rounds of testing in school have been issued with home testing kits and more of these will be made available in the coming days to enable testing to proceed across the Easter holiday period. Although the boys have had a good experience of performing swabs on themselves, they will not have learnt how to perform the diagnostic tests. There is an accompanying leaflet which is very helpful, but it would be very sensible to have parents on hand to support them through this process when they complete this for themselves for the first time this weekend.

We have designated **Saturday** and **Tuesday** for home testing, so their first home test should be completed on Saturday 20th March – this weekend. Your sons will be reminded of this by their form tutors and also through email alerts which have been set up. However, you may wish to set up additional methods at home that will help to establish a routine for testing. You have received a communication from Mr Carr outlining the requirements for reporting results (sent on 12th March). As a reminder, your son should report these results to both, the school, through the 'testregister' website, and directly to the NHS. Once your son has created an account with the NHS, both of these processes are relatively swift and easy to complete.

All of the results recorded to date have been negative – long may that continue! It is likely though that we will have a positive result at some point and if that is the case, please record it and additionally, we ask you to send a photograph to the school showing the lateral flow device result with the barcode visible for confirmation. If your son has a positive lateral flow test result, he should isolate along with other household members for 10 days. He may choose to book a confirmatory PCR test and if that is negative, isolation will no longer be required. It is important to note that close contacts of any positive case will be required to isolate as well – school leaders

will be conducting this track and trace service throughout the rest of this term and during the first 6 days of the Easter holiday.

Student Wellbeing

We have been very impressed by our boys' response to the return to school. They have been extremely respectful of the new measures in place to keep everyone safe and they have enjoyed one another's company and the return to lessons. We have surveyed our students to gain a better understanding of their wellbeing and the measures that we need to put in place to support them in the weeks and months ahead. There are certainly challenges to be addressed, but in the midst of much catastrophising by politicians and the media, it is worth trying to keep these in perspective. There are many who underestimate the resilience and adaptability of young people and we should recognise that the School's response to the challenges ahead has to be tailored to the needs of individuals – a 'one-size fits all' approach is deeply inappropriate. Some outcomes from the survey illustrate this well:

- Most students report that their progress during the last lockdown was good (39%) or average (43%) – only 18% felt that they had made below average progress;
- A large number of students (48%) report that they made better progress in the most recent lockdown than they did during the first lockdown in the summer of 2020, and
- The experience of lockdown did not adversely affect the wellbeing of most students – whilst 31% did report that their wellbeing was worse during this lockdown period than before, 41% actually felt that their wellbeing had improved during the lockdown.

There are students whose mental health was impacted by this period and some report being anxious and depressed. We already have excellent support structures in place for boys in this position and if you feel that your son needs such support, please do alert your son's form tutor and head of year. There are also students who will benefit from tailored sessions to boost their learning and we are in the process of identifying these students for additional online classes. However, for the overwhelming majority of boys, most are simply happy to be back in lessons, socialising with their friends and making good progress in their learning. When asked what more the school could do to support them, the most popular response was to reinstate extracurricular activities. We can't yet organise school trips, but most extra-curricular activities can now return and, in the weeks and months ahead, we should seek to focus on fun!

Curriculum breadth, enrichment and joy!

The summer term usually provides an opportunity for greater flexibility in curriculum design and approach, and we are seeking to replicate this in 2021. Therefore, whilst there will still be some restrictions in place, we are planning to run a programme of enrichment and several events, including a 'sports week' for boys in Years 7-10 and a week of enrichment for boys in Years 7-9, incorporating drama, dance, community engagement, enterprise and outdoor education. In the same week, Year 12 will participate in a programme to support the development of plans for life beyond school, addressing the preparation of a UCAS personal statement, applications to universities & degree apprenticeships and other careers-related advice, together with volunteering and super-curricular opportunities. Additionally, boys in Year 10 will be able to engage in a separate philosophy week to extend their thinking skills, whilst developing their social, moral and cultural awareness.

We are hopeful that all of this will be sociable, productive and enjoyable. It may even be possible for us to invite parents to engage with some of these events, although that will be heavily dependent on the rate at which restrictions are eased. The schedule for these activities will be published in the School's calendar before the end of this term and further details will follow in due course.

Changes to the school calendar

There are some details we can share now. You should already be aware that we are planning to teach a full complement of lessons on the last day of this term, rather than finish early as we have done in the past. Additionally, we will be teaching a full complement of lessons on Founders' Day as we will not be able to visit the church this year. However, there will be no lessons on Friday 28th May (the day before the half term holiday) when staff will be involved in the complex task of moderating assessments to establish GCSE and A level grades – students will not be required to attend school on that day.

Finally, I would like to thank you for your support throughout this most recent lockdown. Your messages of appreciation have been very well received by staff at the school – it really does make a difference.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Cooksey', with a long, sweeping underline.

Ian Cooksey