



## Watford Grammar School for Boys

Rickmansworth Road, Watford WD18 7JF Tel: (01923) 208900  
www.watfordboys.org  
Headmaster: Mr I Cooksey MA (Oxon) MA (Lond)

13<sup>th</sup> July 2021

### Planning for the next academic year

Dear parents and carers,

Following the announcements last week, we are now able to turn our attention to planning for the next academic year. It is our sincere hope that the national relaxation of control measures will be irreversible, so that we can proceed with a measure of clarity and certainty. We are also prepared for the possibility that we may have to adapt again, but let's indulge the notion that we can return to a measure of normality next year!

We have had numerous discussions with students, staff and governors about this prospect and the 'new normal' zeitgeist. It is fair to say that the pandemic has curtailed many activities and approaches that we would want to reinstate at the earliest opportunity and the start of the next academic year will be characterised by our attempts to achieve that goal. At the same time, there have been aspects of our approach in the last year that have served to accelerate trends that we will want to retain and sustain. This letter provides a flavour of our plans for the next year.

#### *The School Day*

With the relaxation of the requirement for 'bubbles' or 'consistent groups' in schools, we no longer need to operate with staggered breaks. For that reason, we will be able return to a school day model which largely replicates the approach used prior to the pandemic. This is shown for clarity below:

Time	Session
8.30am	Period 1
9.30am	Period 2
10.30am	Break (Years 7, 9, 11 and L6) or tutor time (Years 8, 10 and U6)
10.55am	Break (Years 8, 10 and U6) or tutor time (Years 7, 9, 11 and L6)
11.20am	Period 3
12.20am	Period 4
1.20pm	Lunch
2.15pm	Period 5
3.15pm	End of school day (or Period 6 for 6 <sup>th</sup> form classes on Tuesday/Thursday)
4.15pm	Period 6 finishes (for 6 <sup>th</sup> form classes on Tuesday/Thursday)

For those of you that can recall the time before Covid-19, you will note that we are returning to the same start and finish times and we are reinstating the long lunch break for all students without a stagger – this will facilitate lunchtime clubs and societies, so that students from all year groups can participate at the same time – this has been a significant constraint during the last year and we are looking forward to the return of this lunchtime model. We will however retain designated times for the use of the canteen by each year group during the course of the lunchbreak, as this has worked well.

Whilst the envelope of time for the school day has been restored to replicate the old model, you may notice that we have retained the stagger for the mid-morning break. Students and staff liked this model, as it reduces pressure on the playground space, increases accessibility to the canteen and serves to extend the break slightly (by 5 minutes). We have also found that starting the day in the first lesson, during period 1, provides for a sharp focus at the outset and punctuality has improved.

#### *Lessons and form rooms*

At present, our year groups are taught in consistent groups in defined zones. This reduces access to specialised resources and equipment in designated departmental areas. It is also rather dull being confined to one part of the school. For that reason, students will move to departmental areas for their lessons once more from September and we will discontinue the use of zones for subject specialisms. The restrictions on the shared use of equipment should also be lifted which will help us to re-establish a full programme of practical activities in subjects that have been constrained during this year.

We will be retaining zones for tutor time for boys in years 7 and 8 as we believe that this will support their transition.

#### *School clubs, societies and trips*

Whilst we have tried to sustain extra-curricular activities during this year, it has not been without its challenges – there have been times when such activities have been prohibited by the government or constrained by the inability to mix between year groups or visit other schools for fixtures and competitions. Thankfully, our programme of extra-curricular activities has been reinvigorated during this term and we aim to accelerate a return to our full programme in September. I am looking forward to welcoming parents back to watch sporting fixtures, drama productions and concerts in the Clarendon Muse.

The Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award expedition to Snowdonia last week marked the return of UK residential trips for Watford Boys and we are hopeful that we will be able to organise a full programme of trips next year. At present, we are reticent about organising trips abroad for obvious reasons, but trips in the UK should now be possible.

#### *Google Classroom*

The use of Google Classroom was growing across the school before the pandemic took hold and our use of this technology has grown exponentially as we have adapted to the prevailing challenges. This is an example of a trend which has been accelerated by the pandemic (along with online shopping and subscription TV). Prior to the pandemic, students often reported that they would appreciate more widespread and consistent use of Google Classroom across the school – the pandemic has driven that change and its use is now embedded at Watford Boys. This means that we will continue to require students (in Years 8-13) to bring their devices to lessons and a great deal of homework will be set via Google Classroom, although we will expect the boys to use planners to organise their time and study.

We will also be sustaining the use of some live online lessons for shared provision of 6<sup>th</sup> form lessons with Watford Grammar School for Girls. Thankfully, our students should no longer be required to isolate at home next year if they are contacts of a Covid case, as they are under 18 and treated like ‘double-vaccinated’ adults with respect to these rules. Therefore, I am hopeful that livestreamed lessons at home will become a thing of the past!

### *Parental engagement*

Prior to the pandemic, we had multiple discussions about the use of IT systems to schedule parents' evenings and we decided in the end to shelve the idea – amusingly, with hindsight, we thought that the change might be too disruptive. Adaptation to the restrictions, forced us to return to the shelf and dust off the plans, with phenomenal results. Praise for our new approach to parents' consultation evenings has been universal from every quarter – staff, students and parents! This experience has been replicated in many other schools across the country. I am therefore pleased to report that we will retain this system next year.

However, we are keen to welcome you back into school for other events. It is important that we continue to engage with you in person as we can all suffer from screen-time fatigue. To that end, we have organised a provisional programme of information evenings (distinct from the consultation evenings for discussing progress in each subject) for each year group to provide an opportunity for us to work with you directly once more. Further details will follow, but you may wish to make a note of these for your diaries:

### *Parents' information evenings*

Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> September	Year 10
Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup> September	Year 11
Monday 13 <sup>th</sup> September	Year 9
Wednesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> September	Year 8
Thursday 23 <sup>rd</sup> September	Year 7
Thursday 30 <sup>th</sup> September	Year 12

### *Ongoing measures*

We are extremely hopeful that all of these plans can be enacted so that we return to a better year ahead. At the same time, we know that there will be a need for some consideration of risk mitigation in schools. We have already been advised that we should retain a focus on hygiene and ventilation, which is relatively straightforward to sustain – in particular, we will retain our enhanced handwashing facilities for the near future. We have also been advised that we may have to conduct two lateral flow tests on site for each student in September. This was a massive operation in March this year, but with superb support from parental volunteers and adaptable staff, we made it work very efficiently, so we are confident that we can repeat the process successfully. We have already established a rota for conducting the tests on site which will involve students coming into school for their first test, before heading home whilst we process the results. We will expect them to attend in full school uniform, dressed smartly to start the year off on a good note. If the lateral flow test is negative, the students can then attend the next day. The second test will be conducted in the week beginning 6<sup>th</sup> September once they are back in the full swing of the school year. The dates shown below are provisional as we have known the government to change their mind about initiatives like this in the past, but it's good to have a plan in place. Please note these dates for your diaries, but be aware that plans may have to change in accordance with government directives.

<b>Year Group</b>	<b>First Test</b>	<b>First full day: Lessons / Induction begins</b>
7	Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> September	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> September – Induction to Year 7
8	Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> September – lessons underway
9	Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> September – lessons underway
10	Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September	Monday 6 <sup>th</sup> September – lessons underway
11	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> September	Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September – lessons underway
L6	Wednesday 1 <sup>st</sup> September	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> September – Induction to 6 <sup>th</sup> Form
U6	Thursday 2 <sup>nd</sup> September	Friday 3 <sup>rd</sup> September – lessons underway

*And finally....*

We can be proud of our response to the challenges posed by the pandemic – as a community, we have risen to each and every one of them. Although we would never wish to repeat the experience, we can look back with an incredible sense of achievement against the odds – we’ve learnt a lot and we’ve even managed to improve some things for the future. But it has also taken its toll – it has been an exhausting year and we all deserve a break. Enjoy your holidays. We’ll return to these plans for 2021-22 at a later date.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Cooksey'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Ian Cooksey