



# THE BUCKINGHAM SCHOOL

## A SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE

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Headteacher: Mr A McGinnes

23 June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope that you are keeping safe and well.

We feel as though we have now started the next chapter of the School's "pandemic journey" last week. We welcomed back 70% of Year 10 students, and nearly every member of Year 12. Please do take a moment to look on our Facebook page for some photos of our goings on! Next week (beginning 29<sup>th</sup> June), more opportunities for Years 10 and 12 will run, and we hope to see even more students then.

As time passes, we are becoming more and more mindful that the disruption to normal education continues and the need to support our student's wellbeing. Whilst it is starting to be clear that the Government is gearing expectations towards a full return in September, we are well aware that this is also something on the minds of our families, too. "Is my child falling behind? What if they are falling behind? What's happening in September? What about GCSEs, A Levels and BTECs next year?" I'll try and cover as much as I can below:

### 1. The remainder of this term

(Please can I take this opportunity to remind our families that we have already published that there will be no provision for any students on 10<sup>th</sup> July.)

We have been running a distance learning programme from the start of lockdown and we have sought to constantly improve what is in place. As of this half term, all students have access to live Google Meets in all of their subjects and we have invested in two excellent learning platforms to supplement this (GCSE Pod and Tassomai). We have given advice to several other schools, based upon our experiences and successes.

We place a high emphasis on the importance of an academic education, but our first priority is to our sense of community. We have been delighted to have opportunities to bring our students into school and to actually see them! Likewise, we are currently considering how the Government guidance allows us to have some limited face to face contact with Years 7, 8 and 9, in July. If we agree it is safe to invite further students in, we will write to those families. I stress now that the guidance talks about students in Years 7, 8 and 9 making a single visit to school before the summer break, nothing more.

I speak for all of our staff: there is nothing we want more than to see our students back in school.

Also, in response to reports in the media: I would like to applaud the Teachers' Unions, who have been fantastic at this School. They have asked a few valid and reasonable questions about their members' safety and have worked with us to put into place our extensive provision. At no point has anything other than the Government guidelines, which we have stringently followed, caused any restrictions to what we have offered.

Likewise, I thank the many, many families who have taken the trouble to offer us messages of support in person, by email or on social media.

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## 2. The Summer break

We are investigating ideas how to make the best possible start to the next school year, allowing us to properly organise ourselves and to provide some catch up teaching to some of our students. We are considering calling some students in earlier than others – particularly our new Year 7, Year 12 and some other students we would like to do extra work with.

Other than this, having been continuously open since 4<sup>th</sup> January, we are expecting to confirm that we will be closed for the summer. We all need a break – not least the Senior Leadership Team, who have worked continuously, the staff who have operated our “Small School”, looking after key workers’ children and our Administration Team who have worked tirelessly on a whole host of extra tasks. Then there are those students of key workers who have been in school continuously since January – they need a break from school, too.

## 3. Planning for September

We are mindful that there are a number of different possibilities of what the picture will be in September 2020. We hope that, at least as far as schools are concerned, we can operate normally, observing good hygiene routines. At the other extreme is a second spike and a further lockdown. In between lies a range of social distancing measures, which may mean we cannot have all students in school at the same time.

Please be reassured that we are ready for any possibility and can offer a blend of on-site experiences, coupled with our distance learning provision. If any social distancing restrictions – or any restrictions at all for that matter – remain, we will not be able to fully open to all students at the same time.

Examinations in Summer 2021 for Years 11 and 13 (currently Years 10 and 12) are almost certain to go ahead, with students in examination rooms, taking examinations in their chosen subjects, but we do not know whether the courses will be reduced in some way, or some other modification will be in place. So far, Ofqual have only said that “schools will need to be told by the summer.” Years 11 and 13 (currently 10 and 12) will be sitting extra mock examinations early next year, to support early identification of gaps and in case of disruption to the examinations in Summer 2021.

We are mindful of one potential issue in September – that of school uniform. We have been planning to raise our expectations even higher around uniform and equipment in September – especially skirts, ties, socks and PE kit. However, an ongoing pandemic may disrupt availability and require us to alter our policies temporarily. *For now, we understand that there is no issue with school uniform supply and full uniform is expected in September. We recommend shopping early to avoid disappointment!*

## 4. Addressing gaps in progress that may have developed for particular students

There is an approach called the “Recovery Curriculum” which fits very closely our approach to pupils returning in larger numbers. It describes very well our general ethos as a school – “supporting students who need help to be ready to learn.” There will continue to be significant support from the Academic and Pastoral Support Teams in school. We will put information about this in the Coronavirus section of our website and a brief internet search will also lead you to material by Professor Barry Carpenter.

The fundamental principle is that we will firstly ensure pupils are reintegrated socially and feeling part of the school community, as the foundation for them to make strong academic progress. We will also address with them that we understand that they may well have developed gaps in their learning and we will show them that we will help them to become confident learners once again. We will also accept, develop and expand the ways in which pupils will have developed their own learning styles whilst working remotely.

Our approach to teaching will also help students to address their gaps. Broadly speaking, every time students start a new topic, the teacher spends some time checking what their current skills and knowledge are. From this point, teaching can be tailored, with some students accelerating and others having gaps addressed.

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Further still, it would seem that the Government are going to fund extra capacity for one to one and small group teaching for the whole of 2020-21. We are not privy to how this will work at this stage, but this will be targeted at those students who have found working at home very difficult during lockdown because of poor access to internet and technology.

Most importantly of all, we will be using this gap in school running as the opportunity to make a fresh start and to raise our expectations of conduct and application to studies even higher. As recently as March, Ofsted noted... "we noticed the mature way that pupils conduct themselves around the school. Lessons have a calm atmosphere and are rarely interrupted by pupils' behaving inappropriately. Pupils are respectful of staff, one another and visitors." That is just the start.

#### 5. Online learning and use of technology in the future

In September, our new Year 7 students will be the first with 1-1 devices, with most of them owning their own Chromebook, through the School's scheme. The new students will benefit hugely from the lessons we have learned in the last couple of months. Greater access to technology and its effective use in the classrooms and at home, is very much on our minds going forward.

The recent learning about the effective use of technology will change the way we look at many situations and our current students have developed greater skills in learning independently that we will need to nurture and grow. We have rapidly progressed our expertise in Google Suite and also purchased some excellent learning platforms, such as GCSE Pod and Tassomai.

Snow days will never be quite the same again...

#### 6. Finally, a thought. Some perspective?

There is an extraordinary amount written about missed education, during lockdown. An interesting perspective (assuming we return in September), from the Head Teacher of my own boys' school:

- "Students haven't missed education altogether, they have missed *schooling*, and we are just a part of their education." As TBSStars has shown, our students are having some fantastic experiences at home, alongside their distance learning
- Children are typically at school for 2730 days, from Reception to Year 13. At the end of this term, students have been away from school for a maximum of 70 days – around 2.5% of their schooling, but not 2.5% of their education

This won't cause any complacency on our part, but it may help families to consider their very real concerns from a different perspective. I am a firm believer in the resilience of youth. The more that is expected of our young, the more they deliver.

Lastly, I would like to publically thank my excellent staffing team, as without their dedication and commitment, none of this would be possible.

Stay safe and well.

With my very best wishes



**Mr A McGinnes**

Headteacher

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#wearebuckinghamschool

#proudtobebuckingham

#buckingham

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