



# THE BUCKINGHAM SCHOOL

## A SPECIALIST SPORTS COLLEGE

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Headteacher: Mr A McGinnes

11 December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you as we near the end one of the most challenging terms in our school careers.

As you know we have made the decision to stick it out to the end, on Friday 18<sup>th</sup> December, at 3pm. The main reason for this decision is that we recognise that our forced partial closures in recent weeks have presented some families with issues, especially our younger students. We do not wish to end 2020 with more disruption, especially since we are hoping, in spite of ongoing staff absence, to be fully open next week.

I will start rather than end with a thank you to you all. Parents, carers, governors and other local community members have been exceptional this term – since March, in fact. We have genuinely done everything possible at every turn as a school, to support and encourage our students, to keep them motivated and in receipt of an education. In turn, the positive response of the community has made us feel more appreciated and valued than ever before.

### **Site Development**

Excitement, but more challenge!

As a result of Covid-19, our building works (£2.5 million investment) were delayed and the opportunity to make a start in May, was pushed back to late summer. In May, we would have had fewer students on site, followed by the summer break. It has been a challenge throughout this term, since the works started in late August, and are taking place in the middle of a busy school. However:

- Phase 1, which revamped the toilets in the Main Building, and created new classroom spaces is complete. Six new classrooms await the delivery of brand new furniture and will be in use very soon
- Phase 2, which is revamping the main toilets in the Humanities Building, the facilities in the Underground Changing Rooms, as well as extending and remodelling the changing rooms in the Queen's Building, is underway
- In February, Phase 3 will begin – the creation of four new Science labs, to go alongside the five we already have
- Since November, the works to the Judo Hall and the Picnic Area have been underway. Tonnes of earth has been removed in the landscaping and the interior has begun, delivering us another dining room

All works will be completed in May and will allow some important improvements to the way we run our school day.

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## Toilets

A considerable amount of money is being invested in far, far better toilet facilities for the students. They will be safer and cleaner than ever before. However, as the saying goes, "no pain, no gain". As well as the building works, we also have the small matter of a pandemic and wherever possible, Year Groups are using their own facilities:

- Sixth Form – have always had their own toilets in the Sixth Form Centre
- Year 7 and 11 – have allocated separate cubicles in the brand new toilets (boys and girls completely separate)
- Year 8 – have their own toilets in the Humanities Block (boys upstairs, girls downstairs)
- Years 9 and 10 – share the temporary toilets that we have installed as part of the building works. Please note, the doors are chained open on these toilets because they are small and good ventilation is essential – these will be removed when the works are finished

## Car Parking and Dropping Off

Please may we make a request to our community about parking and general driving in the neighbourhood of the school, especially at drop-off and pick-up.

More and more often, we are receiving complaints from local residents, parents and even students about safety. We also see for ourselves when on duty at the gate, what a handful of road users seem prepared to do, to save a few moments of time. This seems to be a particular problem in the mornings, with some reckless driving manoeuvres on view. We do appreciate the stress some parents must be under, to drop off their children and then still get to work on time. We also recognise that some of the traffic is not our own students being dropped off, and we will try to address this with our partner schools. However, there is going to be a serious accident at the junction of London Road and Bourtonville, unless drivers are prepared to act more patiently.

Please note that the bay is strictly for buses only 8am-9am and 3pm-4pm. You can expect to be asked to move if you park there. We may have to consider strategies to stop cars pulling in, such as cones.

As a primary school pupil, I used to walk nearly 3 miles to school. At secondary school, nearly 2 miles. Bearing that in mind, my suggestion, as a solution to the congestion, stress and danger, is that:

- Students who live in Buckingham, or nearby, walk or cycle to school – there are cycle racks at the Swan Pool – obviously these are not our responsibility and students would need their own locks
- Students who require a lift, are dropped in the mornings either at Tesco (0.4 miles away), or at Cornwall Meadow (Waitrose, 0.5 miles away)

## Community Issues

Like so many communities, Buckingham has experienced spikes in anti-social behaviour and more serious crime during and since lockdown. Some young people locally, including a tiny handful of our students, have been groomed into criminal behaviour by adults. As I have always stated, my first priority is that this is a safe school, full of students who make good and safe decisions. Hand in hand with that is that Buckingham is a safe community. It has been our duty and pleasure to work with Thames Valley Police, who have done an excellent job of visibly clamping down on these behaviours in the last few weeks. I cannot say more at this time because of legal processes, but the school has plans to engage students and parents in more opportunities to understand the risks presented by career criminals, who groom young people for exploitation. A key message for our students is that our warnings about online or face-to-face grooming are real. Always report what they know - be upstanding citizens, not by-standing ones.

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## **Standards in Years 7-11**

Our students are in such a positive frame of mind at the moment. General climate continues to get better and better, and we will continue to support our students in making good choices all of the time, displaying ambition, confidence, respect, empathy, resilience, integrity and curiosity.

With well-ordered classrooms and good environments, teaching staff have raised their expectations yet higher. Our students are as capable as any, of enjoying success at school and in life. We are widely becoming celebrated as a highly inclusive school, where success for ALL is a living truth. My stated ambition is that we also become known as a provider of first class opportunities for students to succeed in their studies, preparing them for their next stages – academic or technical.

When we visit lessons, we often note certain aspects of the lesson. Since October, over 150 of such notes have been made, as well as many unrecorded drop-ins. What we are seeing is huge improvements in the quality of written work. We are seeing consistently good or better teaching. We are seeing pupils making great progress. A recent detailed look at Year 11 work was very pleasing indeed, and it well explains their promising mock results. Our attitudes to learning are assessed in words now, and the absolute minimum we are prepared to accept in a lesson is “compliance”:

- Settling quickly and engaging in the lesson from the start
- Taking all notes and writing anything down, as directed
- Participating by contributing answers and suggestions
- Completing all directed work

We will be pushing reward points even more in the future and a full review of these and what students want from them, is underway. We are so lucky to work with the students that we have; they are what makes our school quite so special.

## **Standards in the Sixth Form**

We have pushed harder and harder to raise standards in our Sixth Form yet higher. The recent publication of the Sixth Form Handbook has set our stall out as a provider of a wonderful all round education; one with uncompromising standards and expectations of application to study, dress and general conduct.

Many of the lesson visits outlined above were to Sixth Form classes. Our post-16 students receive some of the best teaching that we have on offer. In our Sixth Form, we continue to prioritise the development of the whole person, alongside great academic results. Again, no surprise that the recent Year 13 mock results were fantastic – well done to the students!

## **Sixth Form Applications**

We are investing heavily into ensuring students have a smooth transition into Sixth Form next year. We are fiercely loyal to our students and their changing needs. If you or your child need any advice or support regarding our Sixth Form and applying to join, please visit the Sixth Form Hub on our website or email Mrs Pykett (Director of Sixth Form). You can keep up to date with Sixth Form and Careers through the Google Classroom. Applications to join our flourishing Sixth Form are live.

Finally, since I thanked our wider community first, I will save the best until last. Your children are served by a dedicated team. Their teachers, teaching assistants, form tutors, Heads of Year, the Student First and Senior Leadership Teams, supported by the admin team, site team and kitchen staff. I hope you will join me in wishing the wonderful staff at The Buckingham School a fantastic Christmas. Never have they deserved a break more than they do now!

Merry Christmas to you all!



## **Mr A McGinnes**

Headteacher

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