

Our Ref: KAB/JHA

17th December 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I'm sure most of us feel that this term has been long and arduous, with some real challenges around managing Covid. Nevertheless, our students have adjusted well to the new routines and I think we all feel happier being back in school, rather than the isolating and alienating experience of the first lockdown.

Staff and students have worked hard this term and, at the time of writing, we have sent off 253 UCAS applications. Reading through all of these might have been time consuming for me, but has above all been heartening, as they represent not just the ways in which our students have managed the Covid experience, despite the restrictions it has brought in terms of learning and work experience, but also the hopes and dreams they have for the future. It has been an overwhelmingly positive experience to read about ambitions that are borne out of a real passion, and interesting to note an increase this year in students applying for health related courses, after being inspired by the National Health Service response to the pandemic.

I remain hopeful that, with the advent of the vaccine, our Year 12 students will be able to participate in at least some of the formative opportunities that help to enhance their applications next year.

Although we are waiting for more detail regarding the government announcements today about a staggered start, at the time of writing, students return in January on the 4th at 9.40am, straight into lesson 2 of week 1. Please also remember that we have a staff training day on Friday 8th January, so school will be closed to students on that day. We will provide any update to the start of term arrangements via the website over the holiday, so please keep checking.

Students taking vocational courses have external exams when they return from the holidays, so should ensure that they revise carefully for these during the break.

We also start silent study after the holiday, from Monday 18th January onwards, which is supervised study periods in the common room and in the new block during periods 1-3. This is a strategy to support students in focusing on work as we start to

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gear up for the exam periods ahead. If students are in school and have a non-contact lesson during these periods, they are expected to be working silently in the spaces allotted to them. The advice to students to be off site during non-contact lessons remains in place, however, and we are not reinstating registration yet.

We have a change of personnel in the Sixth Form team after Christmas. Beth MacGregor is stepping down from her Learning Manager role in charge of Year 12, after working in the team for over five years. Beth will be a real loss and we are sorry to see her step back from her role, a job she has carried out with both compassion and rigour. Amy Bonello will take on her role from Christmas onwards, assisted by Karis Darrie. As soon as possible, someone will be appointed to take on Amy's support of more able students.

We are also deeply sorry to say goodbye to Judith Hardington, whom many of you may have spoken to over the years when you have phoned the Sixth Form. Judith has worked as our Sixth Form administrator for four and a half years and before that, worked at the Junior High and in adult education, when that was based at the school, so she has a long history with us. Judith's calm good humour and supreme organisation skills are what keeps the Sixth Form running smoothly and we will miss her greatly. Judith is retiring after fifty years of working (!) so we send her our best wishes for a long and happy retirement. Jassy Walsh takes over from Judith as our new administrative assistant.

With best wishes for a restful Christmas and a much better New Year than 2020.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Blackburn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mrs K Blackburn
Director of Post 16