



15 July 2020

Dear Parents & Carers,

I wrote to you last July with a clear sense of what the following year might hold in terms of our planning and our intentions for the year ahead. In August 2019, our students achieved the school's best set of A level results and we achieved our second consecutive year of very positive GCSE results, in terms of both attainment and progress. That was followed between September and March by significant progress in terms of transition, pastoral support, curriculum development and inclusion. However, at that point things changed considerably and, like all schools, we have been adapting and learning ever since. On Thursday 2nd July the Education Secretary outlined the Government's plans for the full opening of schools from September. Those plans pose some very challenging logistical questions, but it is helpful to know what is expected and we are working very hard to plan effectively in terms of health and safety, the timetable, curriculum delivery and how best to support our comprehensive range of students.

We will share our planning with the wider school community through a series of 'Friday Updates' via the school website and app during August, and I will write to all parents and carers with a more detailed plan before the start of the new school year in September. The guidance is very clear about the potential difficulties faced by large secondary schools when it comes to implementing 'protective bubbles' and we will act upon the advice given, but, as directed, will do the things that are possible given our building, curriculum and resources. However, it is important to note that we are committed to curriculum breadth and do not intend to reduce options choices at GCSE or A Level. We will make decisions based upon what is appropriate for individual students, but will work hard to deliver a full range of subjects for our Year 11 and 13 students, as to not do so would be contradictory to the school's ethos and long standing commitment to academic excellence for all. It clearly won't be possible in September for the school to offer its usual range of extra-curricular activities and trips, but I wanted to reassure you that our ethos is based upon providing a broad range of opportunities beyond the classroom. Current circumstances require us to focus more directly on the classroom curriculum and to prioritise safety and limiting social interaction. However, we are committed to a return to our broad extra-curricular offer as soon as it is safe to do so.

The period between March and July 2020 has clearly been very disruptive and it is important that we prepare for September in a structured and united manner. It has been excellent to have Years 7-12 back in school between 15th June and 15th July. There are three important reasons why we have worked hard for the return of all students during this term: it has been important for their psychological wellbeing; it has given them valuable time with their Form Tutors and, for Year 10 and 12 students, time with their subject teachers to ask questions and to have a sense of next steps during the summer. We have shared important academic review materials with students who have been in school. These can also be found on the school website in the 'For Students' section, [at this link](#). We have directed GCSE and A Level students to the Home Learning pages of the website, where each subject page has direct links to exam specifications so that students can complete additional work and review during the summer holiday.

I would like to thank the parents of Year 7-9 students who responded to our recent survey; we will be looking to carry out similar surveys at key points during the next academic year so that we can give all parents and carers a voice within our decision making process.

Staffing for September 2020

We have a very experienced teaching staff at Durham Johnston and our teachers tend to dedicate their careers to the school. They are currently planning very carefully to ensure that students and their families have a clear sense of the subject content, assessment and extension work that they will prioritise in September. We are also saying goodbye to some staff members. Mrs M. Farrell, our SENCo since 2013, is retiring and we are saying goodbye to Mrs N. Dench (English), Mrs F. Galvis (Maths) and Mrs K. Crowe (Computing). We would like to thank them for their service to the school. We also welcome the return of Mr L. Smith (Maths) and the permanent appointments of Mrs J. Cummings (DT/Computing) and Mrs L. Wiggers (Music). We are pleased to have such an experienced and stable staff during such a difficult period and, based upon the past 4 weeks, our students clearly appreciate that too.

KS3 (Years 7, 8 and 9) in September 2020

In September, Year 7 will learn to mix with others in a much larger school and will quickly familiarise themselves with our routines and the building. Their induction will take place in the first two days of the new school term and we will offer them continued support as they become familiar with their new school. We will work closely with students to identify any extra support that is needed in terms of KS2 knowledge and will accelerate their understanding of key concepts and the skills necessary in their first year of secondary school.

Year 8 will be offered extra support by their teachers and we will make sure that the curriculum is tailored to their needs. We will also offer pastoral support so that students can feel fully part of the school after a very unusual first year. We will also offer support to our Year 9 students and will provide additional time and guidance before they choose their GCSE options.

KS4 (Years 10 and 11) and KS5 (Years 12 and 13) in September 2020

We will make sure that Year 10 have a positive start to their GCSE subjects and will provide opportunities for any skills or key knowledge from Year 9 to be integrated effectively into their 2 year GCSE courses. We will work very closely with Year 11 students to identify any extra support that is needed and will plan the curriculum very carefully so that time in school is maximised. We will regularly assess their knowledge, understanding and exam skills to make sure that we cover the GCSE specification as efficiently as possible. Year 12 will complete baseline assessments and will also have the opportunity to sit internal examinations after their first term is completed, as, through no fault of their own, they lack experience of formal examinations, having last completed external examinations in Year 6.

Year 13 have been working very hard since March in terms of their A Level specifications and we will also make sure that they are fully prepared for their 2021 A Level examinations. They have already signed up for their Year 13 courses, have been working hard via Microsoft Teams, and we have offered specialist support for those who have are targeting specific jobs, degree course and universities.

Our Current Year 11 and 13 Students

We will also provide a significant level of support for our current Year 11 and 13 students as they prepare for their next steps to 6th form study, University, work or an apprenticeship.

Mrs Lennon has written to all Year 13 students to explain how we will support them as part of the **A Level results day on Thursday 13th August**. Her letter to Year 13 students can be accessed on our website, [at this link](#). We have collected personal items from student lockers and have asked students to bring back their textbooks and locker keys on results day. The 6th form team are currently working hard to arrange an event that will allow us to say goodbye properly too.

We are also very keen to offer support to all of our Year 11 students. Students will receive their **GCSE results on Thursday 20th August** and we will provide help and support to ensure that all of our students are clear about their next steps. Mrs Lennon has also written to the Year 11 students who plan to attend our 6th form. Her letter to Year 11 students about 6th form enrolment can be accessed in the '[New Starters' section of the school website](#)'. Ofqual have produced a very helpful [infographic](#) outlining how GCSE and A Level results have been managed by schools and the exam boards.

Please check our Friday Updates during the summer, as we will provide additional information about our results days on Friday 7th and Friday 14th August.

We have collected personal items from student lockers and would request that students return their locker keys and textbooks. Our pastoral team are currently working hard to arrange an event that will allow us to say goodbye properly and we hope to be able to share details with students on their results day.

Mobile Phones, Use of Social Media and Responding to Queries

Whilst the period between March and July has been very difficult for our school community, there are some important messages that I share on an annual basis and they are all very relevant for September too. Our rules regarding mobile phones still apply: students cannot use mobile phones, unless directed to do so, anywhere on the school site. Please also encourage your child to think carefully before making negative or thoughtless comments about other students via social media. Parents have responsibility for regulating social media use and for ensuring that there are consequences for offensive and unkind behaviour. As parents or carers, I would also encourage you to avoid negative, inaccurate or provocative comments on social media about other members of the school community. We will continue to offer guidance to students about how to de-escalate situations and to avoid confrontation with others. It is important that parents support us in this and set a good example. We are always happy to communicate with parents and carers if there is an issue, but it is important to note that the majority of school staff are very busy between 8.20 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. and may well be working with students before and after those times in the new school year. They teach, meet with and safeguard students, attend meetings and plan. We will always reply if you contact us, but can rarely do so immediately. **It is also very important that parents and carers only come onto the school site if they have an appointment to do so.** This has always been the case, but is made more important by our current need to restrict transmission and to safeguard the school community.

Please can I also encourage you to talk at home about the importance of behaving in a considerate and socially responsible manner on their way to and from school. We will provide additional guidance in August, but please talk to your child about the need for social distancing and sensible conduct as part of their daily routine.

Uniform and Piercings in September 2020

For those of you who will be buying new items of uniform, the uniform requirements are set out in the uniform leaflet included with this letter. Full uniform is to be worn as of September and, importantly, our uniform has not changed. To avoid unnecessary and

and distracting confrontation, please ensure that skirts are of the recommended length and are not made from stretch lycra or knitted type fabrics. Black opaque tights must be worn with shorter style skirts. It is recommended that pupils carry a spare pair of tights in their bag to change into if they become laddered. In addition to the above uniform advice, can I request that if your child is intending to get their ears pierced in the summer that they do so at the very beginning of the summer holiday, so that they can heal and be safely removed for September. These are small things, but our rules are very clear and students should avoid decisions that will impact upon their ability to learn and progress when they return in September.

It has been an unusual and challenging period for all members of our school community and we will work very hard across the summer to make sure that our students have the guidance, structure and support that they need to be successful in 2020-21. Please check the school website, encourage your child to check their school email account and Microsoft Teams and sign up for the school App to receive updates. For our part, we will continue to find ways to improve our communication.

I hope that you and your family have a good summer and that we can all approach our return in September with a sense of shared purpose and anticipation.

Thank you for your ongoing support; it is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



A J O'Sullivan
Headteacher



Headteacher: A J O'Sullivan BA, MA
Deputy Head: R McFadden MEng
Director of Resources: H Charlton BA, MBA

Assistant Heads: J Bell BSc, MA
S A F McArdle BSc
N Weaver BA
M J Wright BA

