

Dear Parents,

My summer end of term letter usually details some of the highlights of the year and wishes everyone a pleasant summer break. However, this has been an academic year like none of us can ever remember, and that is reflected in this update!

I would like to begin by paying tribute to the efforts of the entire OHGS community. The pupils have responded superbly to the challenges of this year, particularly the last term. The level of engagement with their distance learning has been excellent, and I believe they have put themselves in a very strong position with regards to the rest of their peers nationally. Many have shown a greater degree of independence in their studies, and the quality of work they have produced has been fantastic.

I am also immensely proud of the efforts of the staff team. They have worked tirelessly under enormous pressure to provide the very highest level of education and pastoral care that they could to the pupils. I know that pupils and parents are very grateful for their efforts and I wish them a restful summer, before the challenges that September will pose.

I would also like to say thank you to our parent body. No-one would pretend that the last term has been 'normal' or that we have always got everything right. However, the level of patience, understanding and support from our parents has been overwhelming. I am particularly grateful for the considerable efforts of our parents in supporting the children's distance learning, and for your financial support at this time in paying your summer term invoices. This has helped to ensure that the school the pupils return to is the same as that they left on 20th March. Your support has ensured that we have been able to help those most in need, and that we will be able to provide the same high quality of education in September.

Plans for a return in September

Parents will be aware that last Thursday 2nd July the government published its guidance surrounding how pupils can return fully to schools in September. We welcome the news that all pupils will be able to return to school and are very much looking forward to welcoming all our pupils in September.

We will now be carrying out detailed planning on how we implement this advice in our setting and will write to parents in August with our updated risk assessment and details of our arrangements. There is much to digest in the new guidance, but essential measures include:

- A requirement that people who are ill stay at home;
- Robust hand and respiratory hygiene;
- Enhanced cleaning arrangements;
- Active engagement with NHS Test and Trace;

- Formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise social distancing between those in school wherever possible, and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable.

One of the biggest challenges for schools will be the minimising of contacts. The guidance states:

“Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19). This is important in all contexts, and schools must consider how to implement this. Schools must do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing while delivering a broad and balanced curriculum...It is likely that for younger children the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older children it will be on distancing. For children old enough, they should also be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff where possible.”

There are measures that we will have to adhere to inside classrooms, such as seating arrangements and the positioning of the teachers; as well as those outside of the classroom, such as avoiding large gatherings like assemblies. We will work hard with the pupils to ensure that they fully understand the new rules and guidelines, and that all adhere to them.

We will be following strict hygiene protocols in school. One change is that we will remove all keyboards and mice from the computer rooms in senior school from September. This will reduce the number of shared items used by pupils. It will therefore be important that all senior school pupils come to school with their Chromebooks in September.

There is a whole section of the new guidance on arrival at and leaving school, and it does draw a distinction between the use of public transport and school buses. We will be working closely with our school coach operator on the safest method of delivering our school transport. We will be providing school lunches, although arrangements for the dining hall will need careful consideration, and our normal school uniform will be worn.

As regards the curriculum, our staff and pupils have worked very hard this term to ensure that pupils have as few gaps in their learning as possible. We will therefore be able to offer our full broad and balanced curriculum in September. We will also be taking the opportunity to review and refine our practices with regards to distance learning, should there be a localised outbreak of coronavirus after the reopening of schools.

In terms of pastoral support we understand that pupils will need support as they return and we will be doing all we can to:

- Support the rebuilding of friendships and social engagement;
- Address and equip pupils to respond to issues linked to coronavirus (COVID -19);
- Support pupils with approaches to improving their physical and mental well-being.

GCSE and A Level Results

Students in Years 11 and 13 will be thinking about results days for A Level (**13th August**) and GCSE (**20th August**). We will assess the public health situation in early August and write with details of these days then. However, we do hope to be able to distribute results to students in school in person, and to be able to provide our usual support and guidance for students at this time.

Public Examinations in 2021

Students in Years 10 and 12 will have concerns about the arrangements for their examinations next summer. Ofqual have now launched a consultation on their proposals for addressing the issues created by COVID 19. Some of their proposals are:

- Beginning public examinations later (after May half-term) to allow for more teaching time;
- Reducing the requirements surrounding practicals, fieldwork and performance components;
- Introducing more optional question choice in papers, rather than changing the content of specifications.

The full proposals and consultation document can be found by following the link below. I have responded on behalf of the school, but the consultation is open to affected students and their parents too.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-launches-consultation-on-2021-exams-and-assessments>

Summer work

Staff in the Juniors and Senior School have posted optional summer work in the appropriate academic classrooms. In the Nursery & Infants this is being sent directly to parents. Our pupils have worked incredibly hard over the last term and I should stress that this is optional consolidation or extension work, rather than required course content. Parents will have different views about this, but I considered it important that they had this choice.

And Finally

It seems like a long time ago now, but on the afternoon of 19th September 2019 I sat in the school Library listening to the feedback from the ISI team who had just completed their inspection of the school. Their headline judgement was the highest they could give: '**double excellent**'. I thought at that moment that I could not be more proud of the pupils and staff of Oldham Hulme Grammar School; I was wrong.

On the afternoon of 20th March I addressed the school staff at the end of the school day. I told them that people would judge us on our response to this crisis, rather than on any inspection. Over three months on, I still believe that to be the case.

When the inspectors wrote: *“Pupils' use of ICT in the school is excellent. It is expertly utilised in all subjects, both in the classroom and at home, with a well-resourced and supported culture of using ICT as a tool to strengthen their learning”* I don't think they could have imagined how important this was to become so soon.

Having the right tools is one thing, but coping with the crisis that we have faced requires enormous character. What did the inspectors say about our pupils' character? They said they:

- *“show strong resilience when attempting academic tasks”*
- *“are encouraged to persevere and to think how to do work for themselves”*
- *“understand that you learn from making mistakes”*
- *“develop into confident young adults with clear aspirations for success”*

I believe that our young people across the school have demonstrated these qualities very clearly over the last term. I am very proud to be their Principal.

It would be naive to assume that the crisis we have faced is over, but I am confident our pupils and staff will rise to the fresh challenges that September will bring. In the meantime I wish the whole school community a well-earned rest over the summer break.

Your sincerely,

Craig Mairs
(Principal)