

17<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Dear Parents,

Well, another year is nearly over and we have made it to the end of term. The start of 2021 began with just over two months of remote learning and plenty of unknowns and as we head into the Christmas break, in some ways nothing much has changed. Whilst numbers of cases of Covid in the school are still relatively small, the huge number reported nationally this week is leading to much speculation as to what January 2022 will be like. We will continue to take a measured approach to whatever situation arises, responding to government directives (of which you may recall there were several during the Christmas holidays last year), and we will plan to keep things as normal as possible for our school community, but without taking unnecessary risks.

Linked to that, all schools have been asked to conduct lateral flow testing programmes on site when students return in the new year, which we will do on the Tuesday and Wednesday with Years 7 to 11. As FE Colleges are not required to operate a testing programme, we have decided that, in order to get through testing in two days, we will not test sixth form students. This programme should not be seen as a substitute for the regular twice-weekly testing that should have been happening throughout the year; more, a confirmation that all students who come into school are safe to be here. As an addition to the DfE submission that we all have to do once we have taken an LFT, we are asking that you submit the result of your child's last test of the holidays on a very simple electronic form that will be sent just before our return. This will simply provide us with additional reassurance; it will take a matter of seconds to complete, but we would be grateful for everyone's cooperation in doing this. Thank you.

The wearing of masks is certainly set to be with us for some time yet and after their reintroduction in communal areas in November, we have quietly issued students who have forgotten theirs with disposable ones. Our numbers of masks are now looking quite depleted, so please can you ensure that your children bring their own each day. The vast majority of students have been exceptional in terms of having them and wearing them appropriately, but from January, we will be adding in a Level 1 demerit for those who forget, to hopefully bring the compliance rate up to 100%. Students who are exempt should ensure they have the appropriate card to show when asked and should see their tutor if they don't have one.

But there are other things that are nothing to do with Covid and I am delighted to be able to write about those too:

### School Trips

I have been pleased to see the gradual increase of clubs and activities taking place since the start of the year. In normal times they totalled 60 and this term has seen roughly half that number happening; in Terms 3 and 4, the figure will amount to over 40, so we are heading in the right direction. A few weeks ago, 40 Year 8 students had an amazing time at Bletchley Park enjoying code-breaking, developing new-found skills to identify John Cairncross as a Soviet spy and watching some coding on an original Enigma machine. Comparing the reality with the Hollywood film, *The Imitation Game*, was also very interesting for those who went. Fingers are firmly being crossed for the current Year 7 that they will be able to have the same opportunity in a year's time.

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There has been plenty of activity on the sporting front for all of our students, many progressing a long way in regional cup competitions. Particular congratulations to our Under 15 rugby boys who won the county cup final this Wednesday coming from behind to defeat Malmesbury 24-17. But, winning or not, it has been great to see so many students involved in extra-curricular pursuits and I very much hope this will be allowed to continue through 2022.

### **School Events**

It was an absolute joy to have a live Christmas Concert and three nights of the school production, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this year and for those who were lucky enough to be in any of the audiences, I think they would feel the same. We have a very talented student body within the performing arts and it was wonderful to be able to see and hear their acting, dancing and musicianship. Having not had anything like that for two years, it felt extra special and has been a real tonic at the end of a very long, demanding term. These things don't happen just by chance, however, so I would like to say a big thank you to the many staff involved in putting these evenings together. Their hard work and that of the students who have been practising for months was certainly greatly appreciated.

### **Charity**

In my last letter I highlighted the monies raised through HelloYellow and Children in Need. Raising awareness of others less fortunate than ourselves has always been a strong feature within the school and this has continued with other initiatives recently. The Reverse Advent event has proved to be incredibly popular, so thank you for your very generous donations. These items have now been shared between a selection of food banks within our local communities.

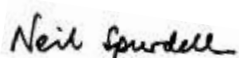
The Corsham based Home Instead Care Home also said a huge thank you for all the wonderful Santagrams that Year 7 made for them to hand over to their clients. The workers there were quick to praise the very many students who had made tree decorations and wrote messages and cards to bring cheer. This had been part of the year group's tutorial work and focus on kindness and it has been gratifying to see that their efforts have touched so many.

### **Farewell**

And finally, whilst we will all be looking forward to our return after a decent Christmas break on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> January, one member of staff is hanging up his DT tools and safety goggles to enjoy a new life in retirement. I don't often single out staff directly, but it would be remiss of me not to highlight the contribution of Carl Orlans who has been Head of DT at Sheldon since September 1988. Carl started here at the same time as I left school, which rather puts into perspective his extraordinary service to the school. 33 years is an incredible amount of time in one place and in all those years under Carl's leadership, countless students have benefited from the provision on offer within the DT faculty. We proudly boast that the proportion of students who choose to do GCSE DT here is twice the national average, brought about by a passion by Carl and his team for their subject; so as he leaves to enjoy more time for himself, he passes on a great legacy to his successor, Gary England, who joins us from St John's School, Marlborough.

Once again, thank you for your continued support throughout an extraordinary year. I hope you enjoy a wonderful Christmas with friends and family and we look forward to seeing what 2022 might bring.

Yours faithfully,



Neil Spurdell  
**Headteacher**