



Friday, 27th March 2020

Dear Parents,

This is the 41st end of term newsletter I have written at the Richard Pate School but is undoubtedly one of the strangest. The world we find ourselves in today is very different to the one we knew even two weeks ago. The news on the television, radio and on-line seems to change every time we tune in and can easily overwhelm with its apocalyptic predictions. These are challenging times and I know many of you are coping with real struggles to do with health issues or financial concerns. We always talk about the family atmosphere at RPS but we genuinely care about the wider community in which we find ourselves. You will receive another letter from me today to let you know what we propose to do in terms of fees but I thought I would keep this newsletter focused on the children's perspective on school life.

ISI Inspection Report: I have great pleasure in sending you our newly released ISI Inspection report. As you will know the ISI came to see us on the 3rd March with one day's notice. They were looking at Focused Compliance and Educational Quality. The ISI stands for the Independent Schools Inspectorate and they are our equivalent to Ofsted. After three days of intense scrutiny the report concluded that The Richard Pate School is "Excellent" in all areas including Pupils' Academic Achievement and Personal Development and meets all the standards of the Focused Compliance. This is an achievement of which we are very proud. I invite you to read through the report because it is also a testament to the lovely children we are privileged to educate. They were a great credit to you all during the inspection and indeed at all times. I am also hugely indebted to my wonderful team here at RPS. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) have all spent many hours preparing for the inspection and the report is a nod to the excellent work done on both teaching and learning and all aspects of compliance since we were last inspected. It is also a shared success for everyone who works at RPS from teachers to teaching assistants, admin staff, bursary, cleaners, catering team and the site team. They are truly dedicated and I feel very fortunate to be working alongside them. In these most difficult times I hope you can spare 10 minutes to read through this report and join us in celebrating a job well done.

Learning Packs: As you know we were not given a tremendous amount of notice that schools were to be closed by the government. We took the decision that given the uncertain future we would send out learning packs that could be done at home and supported by a collection of on-line activities to support your child's learning. We have been really grateful for the feedback we have received and we shall use this to inform our arrangements going forward. We appreciate that this is not an easy situation. Your children belong in school with us but while that is not possible we must all make the best of the situation. We had intended to have you bring those packs back in to School today but that is no longer safe or practical. We will mark the work in due course but ask for your patience in this matter. Going forward we think we have a practical solution to home learning that will minimise these issues.

Remote Learning for the Summer Term: Mr Hooper and the SLT have been looking at a host of remote learning tools trying to search for one that best meets our specific needs. We have settled on a platform called Showbie which seems to give us some excellent functionality. We should be able to post work for your children and allow them to work on it from home before sending it back in to their teachers. It also allows for us to mark up the work and carry on discussions with individual children to support their learning. The teachers are working overtime to get to grips with the technology but we feel there is much to recommend it. Inevitably this will require IT capability but Mr Hooper says it could be done from most smart phones as the simplest means. Inevitably an iPad or computer would be best but we appreciate that the IT capabilities and equipment vary massively from one household to the next. It would be impossible for us to carry on a paper based system for 300 children as I am sure you would understand. We may also look to use other technologies such as Microsoft Teams and Zoom but these would be as a peripheral and should not be essential. We continue to navigate our way through this new reality and appreciate your patience with us through this process. Mr Hooper will be sending out some user guides to help you understand Showbie in the near future.

Running School for Children of Key Workers: In an effort to do our bit to support those essential key workers we have been keeping the school running over the past week. On Monday we had 26 children in the building and 24 teaching staff looking after them. The ratios were very impressive. We also used this time to begin planning the arrangements for the Summer Term. In the ensuing days we have had a slightly smaller number of children but I know the parents of these children have been very grateful for the continuity. We will continue to offer this provision over the week days of the holiday period with the exception of Good Friday and Easter Monday. I have been hugely gratified that every member of the teaching staff who is able to, has volunteered to help this essential service over what would normally be their Easter holiday.

Home Learning Page on the Website: We continue to populate the Home Learning section of our webpage and decided to make it password protected so that the photos you send to us can be uploaded securely. If you are not happy for these photos to be put on the website please let the member of staff to whom you are sending the photos know. Mr Lowe and Miss West continue to evaluate additional resources before adding them to the website for your perusal and enjoyment. As mentioned earlier the access to the Home Learning Page is username: *family* and password: *happiness*. I also wanted to let you know that we have added licences for our Year 5 and 6 children to use Mathletics. We have also enabled Accelerated Reader to be used from home if you wish. You need to type in the URL <https://ukhosted79.renlearn.co.uk/2260032/> followed by their own login.

Seussical Jnr: Our Year 6 children have been putting all their creative talents into the performance of Seussical Jnr based on the stories of Dr Seuss. Unfortunately, the two performances for parents were scheduled for this week so they were unable to share their hard work with their families. The good news was that Mr Chesworth and his team acted quickly to move the performance for the school a day early so the show could be performed in full costume and make up and was recorded by Mr Hooper. It was a magical performance and highlighted so much talent in the year group. We were unfortunately missing some of the performers and it was never shown to the appreciative family members as would normally be the case. It is for this reason that we will do everything in our powers to put the show on at a later date even if it means gathering together in the summer holidays. It was another reminder about what a talented group we have in Year 6 at the moment. My thanks go out to Mr Chesworth who always puts his heart and soul into these performances and to his amazing team for the wonderful backdrop, costumes, props, lighting, sound and so much more.

Year 6 Destinations and Year 5 Meetings: On the 2nd March we discovered where our current Year 6s have been offered places in state schools for September. We have also been getting back information from the independent schools about offers of places and scholarships as well. The children have once again excelled themselves through this process. As I reported earlier in the year, 28 of the children had achieved the qualifying score for at least one of the grammar schools and 10 of those had achieved the required score for Pate's Grammar. Since then we have discovered that every child who applied for a place at an independent school has been offered a place and in their applications they have been offered an impressive 26 scholarships or awards which covered 19 different children. We are still waiting for a few parents to make final decisions but at the time of writing this report we anticipate 22 will take up grammar school places with 9 choosing Pate's Grammar, 13 will follow the independent route and 8 will take up places at local comprehensives.

The process, of course, goes on and our preparations for the current Year 5 children continue throughout the upcoming term despite the remote learning. I have been spending an hour a week with the Year 5s going through preparations for various entrance tests and answering their questions on the transition to secondary schools. That process will continue through the Summer Term and if necessary through the summer holidays to prepare them as well as we can. I have also been meeting with Year 5 parents during the Spring Term and will continue to do so through the Summer Term to discuss the many options available to children at 11+. If you have not booked an appointment with me to date let me know and we can organise a phone meeting during the upcoming term or hopefully back at School in the second half of term if at all possible.

Appointments for September: We have spent much of the Spring Term interviewing candidates for the positions vacated by our retiring members of the team. We have made verbal offers to four people and are working through formal contracts at the moment. I will make announcements more formally in the Summer Term but I am pleased with the calibre of candidates we have to fill the void left by Mrs Jones, Mr Gilvear and Mrs Cooper.

Curriculum Focus: The Summer Term was intended to focus on Languages and Mr Chesworth had a number of activities planned for this important aspect of our curriculum. I anticipate that we will now move Languages to the Autumn Term. This term has cast a bright light on the creative arts and we enjoyed a number of activities around the topic before the term was prematurely cut short.

PTA Events: The PTA send their very best wishes to all our parents and children and hope you are all managing in the difficult circumstances. They have regrettably had to cancel the Summer Ball for obvious reasons and have discussed postponing this until next year. They are particularly sad for those Year 6 parents who were looking forward to their last opportunity to celebrate with their RPS family. The upcoming events in the Summer Term will all be in jeopardy if the current situation continues and we will keep you up to date as decisions are made about the Summer Fayre, Lido Night and Prep Entertainment.

Uniform: It may be overly optimistic to discuss uniform for next term but if we are lucky enough to gather again the children are welcome to wear summer uniform. If we are lucky enough to get back before half term then children have the choice up until the half term holiday to wear either summer or winter uniform.

Car Park: I know you would be lost if I wrote a newsletter that did not report on the car park so I am pleased to say that we have had no incidents in the final week of this term.

Recent Success: We have unfortunately had a number of events cancelled towards the end of this term which would have been wonderful opportunities to see us perform against others locally and nationally. Our cross country team have enjoyed great success this term with a culmination at the county championships. We had Maddie Thomson finish first overall in the Under 11 girls' competition (as she has for every race this year) and Jack Pennell coming 7th, Charlie Parsons finishing 8th and Oscar Henson and Ellie Thomson just outside the top 10. These results are all the more encouraging when you know that Charlie, Oscar and Ellie are all running in the year group above themselves. Sadly they were not able to show what they could do at the nationals because these were cancelled as a result of recent events. Our Under 11 girls' netball team performed well at the southwest regionals finishing fourth overall. The top three were selected to play in the nationals which was disappointing for the girls but that event has now been cancelled as well. Our Under 11 boys' hockey side made it to the quarter-finals of the Southwest Regionals also just narrowly missing out on a trip to the nationals. It has been an impressive year of sport and an endorsement for the additional lessons we have included this year.

We have also seen unprecedented success in Maths with a number of our teams performing well in competitions. The most recent competition was held at Cheltenham College and our Year 6 team finished joint first with Berkhamstead out of 50 teams competing. We have also put our Year 5 and 6 children through the annual Primary Maths Challenge. This involves 65,000 children from around the UK and beyond taking part in a very challenging set of maths problems. We were delighted to discover that two of our Year 6 children earned medals placing them in the top 1950 of all competitors. Oliver Gill walked away with a silver medal and Rosie Mullard a bronze which is a tremendous accomplishment once again.

Finally, our Year 3s took part in the English Speaking Board examinations which sees them prepare a presentation on a topic of interest, recite a poem they have memorised and read an extract from a book they have been enjoying. It is a wonderful opportunity to build their confidence and overcome an anxiety that follows many adults through their lives. The examiner was hugely complimentary of their efforts and their preparation saying he had rarely enjoyed a group as much. The children have excelled themselves this year with 25 earning the top mark of Distinction and 11 a Merit+. We will be delighted to hand out the certificates when we all come back together as a community.

I hope you don't mind me celebrating these wonderful achievements at a time of such uncertainty. As I said to you earlier in the term it is important to look at the positives in a world so engulfed in the negative. It continues to be the greatest privilege to educate your children and while it will prove a greater challenge in the weeks and months ahead we are redoubling our efforts to do the best we can for you and them. I leave you with an interesting tale of a past pupil. Joey O'Neill left RPS 12 years ago. In his final year he did a project for Mr Edwards about how to live to 100. In it he wrote to a huge group of centenarians asking for their secrets. Mr Edwards was hugely impressed with how insightful it was at the time. Joey's mother wrote to me last week with an extract from the Times newspaper. The article documents the amazing work being done with x-ray crystallography to find a cure for Coronavirus. Joey is doing his PhD building detectors for the big accelerator at the heart of this research. We are all about planting seeds for later harvest. Remember to keep safe and well.

Yours sincerely,

Robert MacDonald

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