

Queen Mary's Grammar School



QMGS updates 22-4-20

Dear parents and students

I hope that this email finds you well and that you managed to find some time to rest over the Easter break. We have continued to be open for the children of key workers and there has been a lot to digest from DfE, Ofqual and other organisations. More on that to follow, but I wanted to start with a think piece from Mr Hudson.

A think piece for the week

Hearing Nature (Mr Hudson)

One of the things I've noticed in the last few weeks is I can hear a lot more nature. The usual background traffic noise has subsided and, as I sit writing this with the window open, I can hear several different birds chirping alongside my kids digging in the mud of the back garden, apparently aiming to get to Australia.

Early on we spotted a swan nest along the canal and it's become an almost daily ritual to walk, run or cycle past to check on progress. We've seen the protectiveness of the male swan patrolling up and down, as if on Guard at the palace; there was an awesome moment as the mother stood up and we spotted the eggs in the nest; and later, peering through the fence from the park, we were able to count no less than 7 large pale green eggs.

Robert Macfarlane laments that children are better at identifying Pokémon characters than real animals, but I was amazed this week that my children know the names of the butterflies and shield bugs we've seen. Both of them like being outdoors – my five-year-old daughter's favourite game remains jumping in puddles and getting as muddy as possible. Over Easter, my son (aged 8) camped out in the garden for two nights; but yesterday he decided he was having a "grumpy day" and not leaving the house. It didn't last, but the appeal of the kindle is starting to level with the appeal of nature.

I've always cherished the outdoors and am acutely aware of the positive effect it has on my mood and morale. Most of my clearest memories happened outside. I love to just explore, and remain hearteningly disappointed whenever I glimpse the new steel fence across the road that now blocks access to the wilderness of the former allotments.

Being forced to be indoors so much seems to have awoken many people's inbuilt connection with nature, as shown by the overwhelming influx into National Parks and National Trust land at the start of the crisis. The canal towpaths near me have never been so busy and hopscotch on the pavement seems to have made a resurgence.

It's been a time for many of us to pause, breathe deeply and start to reconsider what's actually important in our hectic lives. I anticipate the "new normal" will see a resurgence in simply being outdoors. As a school I think we value the outdoors, the fact we have kept hold of Farchynys is testament to that, but we could probably still go further in our everyday routine.

The fact the government has allowed daily exercise outdoors during this period of lockdown is testament to the importance of nature in our lives. When you're next outside, whether exercising or simply in the garden, don't forget to keep your ears and eyes open to what's around you. And I encourage you to point it out to your family, even if that means pointing at your ears first to get the headphones removed beforehand!

GCSE and A-level grades

I appreciate that the past few weeks has been very unsettling for those students in Years 11 and 13. Following the Ofqual announcements, I wrote to students/parents on 3rd April. I tried to reassure everyone that we will follow the guidance provided throughout this process to do our best to ensure each student is awarded a fair grade that reflects the work they have put in throughout their course and is the grade they were most likely to achieve in the summer. We are developing a robust internal system to award these grades using a range of evidence.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020/letter-to-students-summer-2020-grading>

Please be aware that the Ofqual guidance states:

- The exam boards will be standardising the grades awarded by the school and they will be moving them up or down in light of national standards
- Students cannot be set any extra work to "help" us allocate a grade
- With respect to SEND and access arrangements; schools and colleges will judge the grade that these students would most likely have achieved if they had been able to sit their examinations with the intended reasonable adjustment or access arrangement in place.

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- The students will find out their grades on the August results days
- There will be an appeal process to be announced later by OFQUAL and implemented by the exam boards
- There will be an Autumn exam series for those that think they could do better than the grade awarded by the exam boards in the Summer
- It is important schools and colleges do not share provisional grades, nor rank orders, with students or parents and carers before final results have been issued. This is to protect the integrity of the teachers' judgements, and to avoid teachers, Heads of Department or Heads of Centre feeling under pressure to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence

I asked parents and students to respect this advice and do not ask any teachers for information about the grade being given for or how it has been arrived at. However, a number of people have made contact with staff since this date. I have to keep a record of this as Ofqual state in their present consultation:

*"To enable teachers working together within schools and colleges to reach these judgements fairly and objectively, they will not discuss their evaluation of the evidence or disclose the judgements they reach with students or their parents or carers. Students, parents and carers should not seek to influence the judgements made; attempts to do so **may be investigated by an exam board and found to constitute malpractice, which may result in sanctions.**"*

All staff have therefore been instructed not to reply to any such request for information and to report it immediately to the Headmaster. Any attempt to influence decision-making could result in exam boards imposing sanctions upon individual candidates. We will await the results of this consultation and, of course, follow any guidance on reporting such incidents to the regulatory bodies, including exam boards.

Home learning

Work should have been set by departments to coincide with the start of the new term on 20th April. Additionally, a significant amount of material has been published over Easter and is now available to access:

www.thenational.academy

www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education>

There have also been government announcements of support for students who haven't got access to digital devices. We don't know the exact criteria for this as yet, but do please get in touch with the school if you have an issue.

I am aware that Ramadan starts for some members of the school community over the next few days and I hope this goes well. I have spoken to staff about being flexible with deadlines, but it is important to develop effective routines.

It is our intention that the internal exams for years 9, 10 and 12 will take place as planned, but we obviously cannot give firm assurances on dates. It is important that the students in these year groups are working towards them, as they are key assessment milestones.

Online safety

I wrote at length last time about e-safety and I hope that you took the time to look over these resources. More information and resource has since been published on the 'Think U Know' website:

<https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>

Supervision of children with key workers as parents

We have continued to work with QMHS to provide this support, which will continue for those who need it over the coming weeks. I have written to these parents separately, but please do contact us at enquiries@qmgs.walsall.sch.uk with any other questions.

https://qmgs.walsall.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020_letters_key_workers.pdf

We have also been made aware of free travel that is available on public transport:

<https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/free-bus-and-tram-travel-for-all-nhs-staff-during-coronavirus-outbreak/AmpMaster>

Free school meals

We have been contacting parents directly about the voucher system for those who qualify for free school meals. If you haven't heard from us, and you think you should have, please visit the school website:

<https://qmgs.walsall.sch.uk/students-eligible-for-free-school-meals/>

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Pastoral matters

Mr Collins, Mr Brown and the pastoral team have continued to make active contact with students who have identified SEND, safeguarding and other welfare needs. This will continue through the closure and please refer to the contact details in my letter dated 19/3/20:

https://qmgs.walsall.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020_mar_school_closure.pdf

An emergency safeguarding number is available on the answerphone if you call the main school number and lots of information is on the website:

<https://qmgs.walsall.sch.uk/safeguarding-and-welfare-concerns/>

Mr Farnell will also now be available from 2-4pm each week day on a school mobile (07849398033). This service is being provided for students who would like to talk to a member of the pastoral team with any concerns or worries that they might have.

CCF

The CCF will be holding "virtual parades" through the CCF Teams site on Fridays starting at 4pm. Please follow their communications channel to find out about these.

School trips

With the current exception of the South Africa trip, all other visits this academic year have been cancelled and refunds should be processed through parent pay. Please contact the finance office if there is an issue here on parentpay@qmgs.walsall.sch.uk

With regards to the Operation Wallacea trip to South Africa, we are currently liaising with our insurers and will communicate with parents in due course.

Final thoughts

Finally, two pieces of positive news to share in the community. The first is the Spring term edition of the QM Observer, which I spoke about in my last email, but didn't include! Thanks to all those who helped put it together and it is great to read about the things that were going on before we closed. It can be found on the website:

https://qmgs.walsall.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2020_spring_qmo.pdf

Secondly, I wanted to share Ethan Kudhail's (7G) experience in filming a programme called 'Craft Party' for CBBC. Well done to Ethan and I hope it provides an inspiration to all members of the community to be creative in a time of lockdown:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0007tjc>

Please do share any good news stories with me, so that I can include in future newsletters.

Warm regards



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