



## QMGS updates 20-5-20

Dear parents and students

It is a common occurrence for students to take to the stage in the main school assembly, in order to deliver an address. Dylan Heydon-Matterface submitted the excellent reflection piece on his consumption of media and fake news for the most recent fortnightly PSHE competition and I am delighted to include it here to start the updates this week.

### **A think piece for the week**

*Dylan Heydon-Matterface*

In more normal times, I don't tend to follow the news too closely, but I do pick up on important stories and events occasionally. For example, I tend to check the news if I know general election results will be announced, or if a new law is in the process of being put in place, but I don't go out of my way to check the news every morning.

I think the main reason for this is how many popular news stories are intended to be shocking and provoke a strong emotional response. It's unsettling to know how many terrible things are happening simultaneously worldwide, and if you were to follow every popular news story, you'd lose all hope for humanity. It's become commonplace for stories about mass shootings or terrorist attacks to appear on the news as the public becomes more and more accustomed to hearing them, which worries me immensely. If we just accept that these acts are a way of life, we may lose our strong opinions on them: people may stop speaking out as they believe their efforts are hopeless, and the public will allow it to continue. I think less-regular viewings of the news are more beneficial, as it means you are more shocked and surprised to hear what stories there are, and it keeps your opinions on immoral acts clear.

When I do access the news, I mainly do so through social media. I accept that the information you hear on social media cannot always be trusted with certainty unlike other forms of media, but on social media you can be exposed to the opinions of thousands of people reacting to the stories. You may watch a news story on the TV where you can see high-definition images of horrific scenes unfolding in the moment, but you only hear the opinions of a few people, or maybe no opinions at all. In this way, I think social media is a good way to hear about news, as you are able to read through the comments of many people, some of whom may be very educated on the subject in question, and who may provide light on the bigger picture. In reality, the horrific scenes displayed on TV may only be affecting a small number of people, because action against the event had been taken days prior. When you see a story on a platform not dedicated entirely to news, you are able to hear all the information on the event and form your own opinion with better justification.

In recent months, my view on receiving news has only been strengthened. Many reputable news sources have filled their websites and newspapers with stories on the virus, clouding the public's view on the world. Any topic not directly related to the pandemic is pushed far down the front page, where it is inaccessible to the vast majority who only read the top one or two stories every day. Journalists are eager to broadcast articles in minutes when an update is published on the latest figures, in an attempt to get views by shocking the public with their statistics. On social media, however, the news on the latest figures is pushed to the bottom, and unrelated news is brought to the top. The precedent seems to have been set that news websites are used for news on the virus, and social media is used for other news. I am pleased with this new approach: it means I can control whether I want to read news on the negative impacts of the pandemic, or the numerous positive ones.

My go-to source for reading news is Reddit, a website where you can choose which categories of posts you want to see and which you don't want to see. It has many benefits over traditional social media, as instead of seeing only posts from people you know, you almost exclusively see posts from people you don't know. Positive stories from across the internet are scoured by people with a lot more free time than you, and you can see stories that you would never normally see. I find this to be incredibly useful when I want to form a justified opinion about a recent event, as numerous accounts from all sides of the story are clearly visible, and anyone who posts deliberately misleading information is quickly ostracised from the community.



I think seeing the sheer number of articles about the devastating impacts the virus is having on society has certainly shaped my opinions. As I mentioned before, continuously hearing similar stories every day has meant I largely ignore anything relating to updates on the coronavirus. I did attempt to try not to be influenced in this way, as I worried about how my view on the severity of the situation would be shaped in a way I didn't want it to be. Unfortunately, despite my best efforts, I think I do now perceive the situation to be better than it actually is as a result of the continual media coverage, because I no longer pay much attention to virus-related news.

Before watching the videos on fake news, I thought that my level of expertise on fake news was adequate. I had confidence that if I saw a story from an unknown source, I would identify it as such, but beyond that I didn't really know much. I think the main way these videos have impacted on me is that I now no longer perceive news as something that you can easily trust with little regard to researching the reputability of the author. Instead of seeing a news article and checking its credibility if it seems fake, I now check the credibility of an article if it seems genuine. On paper, this seems like a small change to make, but it means that I have a lot less faith that the information I receive online and on TV is real. I recognise that the whole idea of news is to inform people of accurate information about current affairs, but with the prevalence of fake news in modern-day society it seems as though that aim has been forgotten by many journalism outlets.

In the future, I foresee deepfakes becoming a serious problem in the way we consume news online. Even in 2020, when you see a video of something ridiculous a politician has said, you wonder whether the video may be the product of a deepfake or not, when the technology is still being developed. In the future, the only way you may be able to tell a real video from a fake video is from what the subject is saying, rather than how they are saying it. This is alarming, as a deepfake with believable content could fool a large proportion of the population. I hope that I would not be taken in by these fake videos, but with the inevitable advancements in the technology, it is almost certain that many genuine-seeming videos will surface online.

News in the modern era has been dramatically impacted by how easy it is for someone with no journalism qualifications to begin producing articles online and share them with the whole world. As more and more fake news appears online, the public's trust in journalism diminishes, and the probability of an unusual news story being accepted by the world falls. It is unfortunate, but it is now just one more thing we must deal with in this far from perfect world.

## **New DfE guidance and home learning**

As I mentioned last week, the new DfE guidance states that:

*"Secondary schools, sixth form, and further education colleges to begin [from 1<sup>st</sup> June] some face to face support with year 10 and 12 pupils, although we do not expect these pupils to return on a full-time basis at this stage"*

We have spent the past week planning for what this might look like, including risk assessing the practicalities of partially re-opening. We will be sending a digital survey to parents of students in Years 10 and 12 this week, to capture your thoughts on face-to-face engagement after half term.

The emphasis on home learning will continue for some time and we continue to keep up our support via Teams and other online sources. It is important that students engage with this content and liaise with staff if there are issues.

Staff will be respecting the half term break, so work will not be set in the week beginning 25<sup>th</sup> May. We will re-start the online learning from June 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **Internal exams for Years 9, 10 and 12**

In light of recent government announcements of which students are likely to return to school in June/July, the end of year exams will not be going ahead this summer term. We will be communicating more information about alternative arrangements as soon as possible, especially with regard to UCAS predicted grades.

# Queen Mary's Grammar School



## Seneca

Many of you may be aware of Seneca Learning, a free online platform that is being used for some classes across the school. They have just released a new feature so that parents are also able to monitor their child progress. There are two links below that explain how to get this set up.

How to sign up as a parent:

<https://help.senecalearning.com/en/articles/3661316-how-to-sign-up-to-seneca-as-a-parent>

How to connect a student account to a Parent's account:

<https://help.senecalearning.com/en/articles/3990859-how-to-connect-my-parent-account-to-my-child-s-account>

## QM Scholars seminar 2

- I am grateful to Mr Dryhurst, Mr Bradley and Miss Richards for putting a lockdown version of the QM Scholars programme
- QM Scholars is for the most curious and intellectually ambitious students of Queen Mary's Grammar School and it (or a version of it) is running in lockdown. If you are in KS4 or KS5, then you can join our MS Team using the code 3dzn80s. Once you have joined, you will have access to the reading material, updated week-by-week. The post function of the Team will be available to you to discuss, debate and ask questions about the ideas at play in the reading.
- The second seminar is convened by Miss Richards. It is entitled: 'Has history become self-flagellation?' We will examine the role of racial discrimination in American history. Participants are invited to consider how the USA should deal with its past and how we in Britain should deal with difficult issues in our own history: in particular, the British Empire.

## Free access to magazines and journals

Mrs Walker in the school's library has signed up to a special offer, enabling students to have free access to 10 magazine titles (including back issues) for the following:

- BBC Music
- BBC History
- BBC Science Focus
- The Biologist
- Chemistry World
- Geographical
- Prospect Magazine
- The World Today
- Resurgence & Ecologist
- New Internationalist

To log in using your six-digit library card number please follow the steps below.

1. Visit our log in page: <https://exacteditions.com/login>
2. Select the "library card" option in the top right-hand corner.
3. Enter your six-digit code (726171) into the "card number" bar and log in.

## QMGS Reading Competition Summer 2020 (Mr Dryhurst)

Two English-based competitions are running: the QMGS Reading Competition and the Foyle Young Poets Award. Both will give you the opportunity to win house points and to compete for your house. Information can be found via the Parents & Students tab on the school website.

# Queen Mary's Grammar School



Students from QMGS have attended the Hay Festival in the past, to indulge their love of reading. Unsurprisingly, the event is not running this year, but there is an online version to sign up to:

<https://www.hayfestival.com/home>

## DfE Support for parents

We understand this is a challenging time for parents too, many of whom are now supporting their children's learning at home or may have questions about their children potentially returning to school.

We have developed the following guidance and resources for parents to support them at this time:

- [Q&A](#) which answers key questions parents may have
- [Guidance for parents on phased reopening of education settings](#)
- [Guidance for parents on supporting learning at home](#) for early years and primary age children (secondary school guidance to follow)
- List of [online resources](#) to support children's development

Please do share these with parents if helpful.

## Updated guidance from the Student Loans Company

Deputy CEO of the Student Loans Company, David Wallace, is advising students thinking about going to university for the first time this autumn to complete their funding applications online as soon as possible. New students are being asked to submit their applications before 22 May 2020. The deadline for returning student applications is 19 June.

Applications for student finance can be made here: <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance>

The Student Loans Company has updated their guidance for prospective students to include guidance for those whose academic year is extended because of the coronavirus outbreak and for migrant worker student applicants.

The guidance can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-current-students>

## 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, including half term (with the exception of Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May). I have written to these parents separately, but please do contact us at [enquiries@qmg.walsall.sch.uk](mailto:enquiries@qmg.walsall.sch.uk) with any other questions.

## 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://qmg.walsall.sch.uk/students-eligible-for-free-school-meals/>

## 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://qmg.walsall.sch.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2020\\_mar\\_school\\_closure.pdf](https://qmg.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://qmg.walsall.sch.uk/safeguarding-and-welfare-concerns/>

Mr Farnell is 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.

## RSHE policy

We included a draft of the revised RSHE policy on 6<sup>th</sup> May. Please e-mail [rshe@qmg.walsall.sch.uk](mailto:rshe@qmg.walsall.sch.uk) if you have any questions or concerns

# Queen Mary's Grammar School



## 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.

## QMA

Please don't forget the **Easy Fundraising scheme** – a great way of raising money for the school with very little effort during online shopping. Make sure you register, if you haven't already, at:

<https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/queenmarysgrammar/>

## Final thoughts

The issue of mental health seems particularly prominent at the moment, as we are all dealing with changes to our established routines and social networks. I am pleased to hear of so many examples of the QM community coming together for support. This week is focussed on mental health awareness and there are lots of resources available online at the Mental Health Foundation and other sources:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/campaigns/mental-health-awareness-week>

I have included a flyer below for the Kooth online community and urge people to seek support if you feel that you are struggling.

**kooth**  
Your online mental wellbeing **community**

**Mental Health Awareness Week 2020**  
18th May - 24th May

- Discussion Boards
- Kooth Magazine & Help Articles
- Free Counselling
- Journal & Self-Help Tools

Sign up for free at **Kooth.com**

With warm regards and best wishes



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