

Dear Parent/Carer

Message from the Chair of Governors

I'm very honoured to be the Chair of Governors for Carre's Grammar School. Governing in the past ten months has been nothing like any other time. The effects of COVID-19 have been felt throughout the world and no one is immune to its affects. The country came to a stop in March and most of us were sent home in the hope that we could wait it out. But schools can't stop, we have a duty to ensure the education and well-being of our students, so in a time when everyone else had no option but to stop, staff and students were working doubly hard to put plans in place to keep learning going. So keep going we did, and as such I would like to take this opportunity to thank all our students and their families for the amazing way in which you have handled this pandemic and how you continue to support our school. It deepens my belief that we have one of the best school cultures around.

Teachers have been, and are still, working tirelessly to ensure our students don't miss out because of the initial lockdown and the current self-isolation rules when cases are identified within school. The national picture of education losses since March is staggering; however, Carre's Grammar School does not follow this trend, our staff and students responded quickly to remote learning and as a result of their hard work students are not left with large knowledge gaps and are able to continue with their studies in their new year groups. It must be noted that those students finishing years 6, 11 and 13 suffered the biggest disruption to their school careers, missing out on their SATs, GCSE and A level exams, prom nights, expeditions and simply being able to say goodbye to their friends and teachers. I have been very encouraged by the way the new students in years 7 and 12 have settled into the next stage in their education journey.

We must not underestimate the effects of COVID-19 on everyone's mental well-being, and we are very fortunate to have a wonderful Student Support Team at Carre's. I would invite parents to start a conversation with their sons to explore how school life is for them with the measures and restrictions that are imposed upon them, and if you find they need extra help to get in touch with the team. We have been incredibly lucky that the number of cases arising in our school have been low. But is this luck? No, it's a combination of the comprehensive measures that have been put in place by the school team and the diligence of our students and staff in following them. I would ask that you continue to impress on your children the importance of social distancing rules both in school and as they move around our town.

Whilst we cannot predict the end to this pandemic or know what the new 'normal' will look like, we will continue to ensure all the needs of our school community are met and once again I thank you for your continued support.

Jo Slesser
Chair of Governors

The week just gone...

This has been a more difficult week at school with both staff and students being affected by Covid-19, with positive cases for both and a number of students and some staff required to self-isolate. You are aware that we have had some cases which have affected different year groups, and none more so than Year 11 who are doing their mock exams this week. They have coped admirably well, particularly those who have had to do them at home, and I feel it is worth

reassuring all parents that this diagnostic assessment of their sons is not the definitive grade that they could achieve in the summer should GCSE exams not go ahead in their proper format, and nor will it shape the grades. Our staff have a wealth of evidence that they can use to assign centre assessed grades, should this be needed as it was this summer, and the mock exam is just one piece of evidence. We shall be running a second mock exam in the Spring Term, which will provide us with both further diagnostic assessment and another piece of evidence.

School Closures?

I was asked by the media this week about one of the unions demanding the closure of schools now to help combat the spread of infection. Some of you will have seen my response in the Sleaford Standard, but I thought it would be worthwhile to publish it here so that you are aware of my view, but I would welcome your views on this, too, so please do write to me on this issue. There is a growing feeling amongst the public that schools should close to help limit transmission and enable families to celebrate Christmas together with their friends and wider family. Maintaining social distancing and following the guidelines will help with this, and it is important that our young people do this when out of school.

Staff and leaders at both schools in the Trust are working tirelessly to maintain provision and manage complexities as pressures arise due to the potential rise in COVID cases and managing the impact of track and trace. Children are better attending school wherever they can, and where it is safe to do so, particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged children, and I am so proud of the staff and students in the Trust for maintaining such a high quality of education. The two schools have worked closely together to maintain the high quality of education.

Staff are working very hard to support students' academic progress and their mental health and wellbeing, as they always do. They have had to learn lots quite quickly about remote teaching or live online lesson delivery and this has demanded training and practice. However, the absence of extra-curricular opportunities and planning means that teachers' focus can be given to quality teaching. What is hard for them is juggling online and face to face lessons with classes sometimes made up of students in the classroom with some of their peers joining live from home. This takes skill and lots of preparation to make sure both sets of students get the best experience at the same time. With the support of parents, combined with students' own self-motivation in our settings, means that excellent student progress is possible.

We have welcomed the adjustments the exam boards have made to the exams this summer both in terms of timing and the syllabus content and teachers feel confident that students will be prepared for the summer exams. However, continued and inevitable further disruption and staff and student absence will be a further obstacle, but I am confident that we can overcome these. What is causing difficulty for staff and school leaders alike is the void of detail from the government about the 'back up plans' in the event that summer exams are disrupted or that the assessments don't provide a nationally fair playing field. Subject leaders need to know what assessments they are preparing students for and students are unnerved by media rumours and uncertainty from Ofqual in this regard. Aligned to this, student and staff absence through self-isolation is certainly of concern but has been mitigated to a large extent by our early and conscientious adoption of live teaching back in June so that students and staff at home are able to continue with lesson and delivery of the curriculum. Because different students have had to self-isolate at different times and for different lengths of time it is hard to ensure all students have had access to the face to face learning that is best for them.

It is the longer-term effects on students' mental health and well-being that could be a legacy of this pandemic for us all so it is important that schools stay open to help support parents manage this.

Students working from home

Should your son/daughter be self-isolating, the following is in place to ensure that disruption to their learning is kept to a minimum:

1. Work will be set via Microsoft Teams for their specific class by their class teacher. Some teachers will be in email contact, but students cannot expect this and should contact their teachers if they are unsure about anything.
2. Students must log on each day and complete the tasks set. Work will be set by 6pm on the day the lesson would have been.
3. Some staff may be teaching a lesson that is suitable for students to join live from home. Staff will let students know via Teams or email if this is the case

Clothing

The weather is definitely autumnal now and we are moving into winter, but we still have to ensure ventilation in the classrooms which means that whilst the heating is on, we have to leave windows open. It would be prudent, therefore, for students to have warm clothing, which conforms to the school uniform code, of course, which would mean black V-neck jumpers; so, no round neck jumpers, no jumpers or sweatshirts of a different colour other than black and no hoodies under blazers. Similarly, students are outside at breaktimes so a coat is a useful addition to their attire. We keep the policy of being outside at breaktime under constant review, as we do with all of our current measures, and please be assured that when the weather is inclement students will move indoors.

N M Law

Headteacher