



Dear Parents and Guardians,

I write as the first mini-section of term draws to a close. It has been quite a month – and your boys have been magnificent. Spirited, polite, cheerful, fun to be with. For me, there have been many highlights, but my most satisfying was yesterday, simply wandering around the school, taking in the calm focus of every classroom I visited. Every single classroom in the science block was full; barely a boy or staff member even remotely (if you will excuse the pun) broke their concentration as I walked in. The engagement was hugely impressive. In the music block was music – which may sound obvious, but it had been forced into the background for the first fortnight of term and here it was, bursting into life. It is uplifting to have live music back in our midst. And then today, as the boys came in for mufti day, the monitors, following a senior tradition of themes for these days, all came to school in cricket whites – they had chosen ‘village cricket’ as their theme, and suddenly all was well with the world...

Eerily, as if the magazine’s editors had been spying from above, came the news today also that our Director of Cricket, Gary Steer, (much to his own delightful bemusement) is shortlisted for the ‘unsung hero’ award in this year’s Tatler Good School’s Guide. We agree (with Tatler, rather than with Gary)! Well done to him!

There have of course been challenges. One of the challenges has been the number of boys and staff (including their families) needing to isolate briefly while awaiting test results. The community has had between 40 and 50 tests this term already (all negative) and this has particularly disrupted a number of boarders (because a whole ‘pod’ has to isolate when a single boarder goes for a test) and a number of classes, where cover is required for an absent teacher (whether it is for their own test, or one in their immediate family). To alleviate the two latter examples, the school has invested in its own testing machine (a SAMBA II, also used in the NHS, notably at Addenbrookes and Bedford Hospitals) which will allow us to administer tests onsite and return results within 90 minutes. These machines have a relatively low daily capacity, so we will not be able to offer this to local families, but it will help us to keep boarding houses running safely and it will also ensure a much more efficient continuity of teaching, which will benefit *all* boys significantly this winter. The machine is already in use in a number of the big boarding schools (from whom we have taken advice) and will be in place here by half-term; it will make a huge difference to the smooth running of the school.

Continuing a theme, we have (so far) tried to let families know when a boy has gone for a test who sits next door to their son in class – just to let you know that he will need to isolate if that test subsequently comes back positive. We propose from now on to only contact you if there **is** a positive result – which will hopefully alleviate any angst, as well as excess administration.

It is clear, obviously, that the number of cases in the country are on the rise. I ask you all, please, to enjoy the exeat weekend in a safe way. This is a big daily community here and we are all responsible for its wellbeing. Thank you for all you have done so far to make this a happy and successful start to the year.

With kind regards indeed,

James Hodgson  
HEAD MASTER