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# ROYAL ALEXANDRA & ALBERT SCHOOL



## Head's Letter to Parents December 2020

Dear Parent,

When the School opened at the start of the academic year, we were facing a great deal of uncertainty about how we would operate during the COVID-19 pandemic.

My main priority was to get our pupils back to school so they could have some semblance of normal life: having face-to-face teaching, enjoying activities, getting back together with old friends and making new friends. Whilst we have not been able to get back to the normality of pre-COVID school life, I am pleased we have been able to keep the majority of pupils in school for the term.

This has been no small undertaking, as we delivered lessons simultaneously in classrooms and online, offered a wide range of co-curricular activities and safely ran boarding houses. I don't usually use the end of term letter to praise our staff, but this year I hope you will join me in giving them an enormous 'Thank You'. Delivering a full curriculum of lessons, pastoral care and activities, whilst dealing with houses going in and out of isolation and changing government guidelines, has been a truly herculean task. This year, more than ever, my colleagues have really earned their Christmas holiday!

I would also like to thank you, the parents, for your support this term. In an ever-changing world, we have had to adjust our ways of working to comply with new guidelines and I know this has had an impact on you and your children. We have tried to respond to feedback and earlier this term your comments prompted us to re-think our approach for the after-school Flexi Boarding provision. This led us to transform the state rooms in Gatton Hall into comfortable relaxation spaces for a number of pupils and I think this has worked well.



I am pleased to say we have not allowed the pandemic to stop us from doing most of what we do best!

Pupils have made excellent progress in class and are well on the way to acquiring the knowledge they will need to perform well in end of year assessments and external examinations. The PE Department has kept everyone active and engaged in sport, replacing fixtures with inter-house competitions. These have generated some healthy competition which has seen pupils excel. It was fantastic to see so many pupils engaged in some fun but competitive sport at long last. Fixtures against other schools are due to start in the new year, subject to no further changes in the COVID guidelines.

Despite the challenging restrictions on performing music, the Music Department have delivered a number of performances including the A level and GCSE performance groups and the Christmas concert – this was of particular note as different Year Group bubbles had to be recorded at different times! We are due to take delivery of our eight brand new Steinway pianos imminently and I look forward to hearing our talented musicians perform on these in future.



The Drama Department had to put this year's school production of 'Hairspray' on hold, however, they have been working hard on an original full-length feature film. Lots of work has been going on behind the scenes, using various locations around our wonderful site and both staff and pupils in the cast - the hope is that we will have a finished piece by the end of the academic year, which we are all excited to see!

Despite facing many restrictions on their lives, pupils have nevertheless focused on those in need, with various fundraising events this term. These included support for Movember, including mini-Movember in the Junior School, wearing yellow for mental health and events for Anti-Bullying Week. One of our Gatton Values is 'Contribute to our community and to society' and pupils have demonstrated this admirably this term.



Anyone who visits Gatton Park can't help but notice the ongoing groundworks for the ground source heating project. The laying of 67km of underground pipes was always going to be disruptive, but pupils have coped well with the changes to routes around the School as the work progresses. We are now entering the final phase of this project, with the remaining plant rooms being switched on by Easter. The result will be well worth it when the School is heated entirely by renewable sources of energy.

There can be no escaping the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but, as we progress through these difficult times, we have much to be thankful for - for me I am particularly thankful for our strong and supportive Gatton community.

Each year we carry out a pupil survey in November/December and we will send details of this year's survey results next term. This year we included a question about the pandemic and the response from pupils was poignant:

*Question: What are you most looking forward to after the COVID-19 pandemic?*

*94% said 'More freedom'*

I am sure we can all echo these thoughts.

With best wishes to you and your family for a relaxing Christmas holiday.

Mark Dixon  
Headmaster

