

PASS IT ON



Join our house challenge!

#RGSGivingDay

Oct
15/16

From the Headmaster

It has been a strange last 48 hours or so with the heart of Guildford – offices, retail and hospitality – now closed and an eerie succession of premises plunged into darkness. With the clocks going back, daylight hours are getting increasingly shorter; the news is full of doom and gloom; even the Christmas lights adorning High Street are switched off and lifeless. It would be easy to focus on this rather grey, bleak, dour context; I am delighted to report, however, that the RGS is buzzing with energy, vibrancy and good humour. I do not for a second underestimate the challenges facing so many of our community as we enter lockdown v. 0.2; however, I am reassured that there is a commitment by the government to keep schools open and running as normally as is feasible in the current climate. I have no doubt that it is in the best interests of our boys to be physically in school and they deserve huge credit for yet again adapting to this new norm with such willingness and understanding.

With the various obstacles which we all face, looking out for each other has undoubtedly never been more important. Our boys' education is vital but pales into insignificance compared with their mental and physical wellbeing, their welfare and their self-esteem. As I said to the boys earlier this week, we are absolutely focused on providing as full, and safe, an educational experience as possible. Although some doors will necessarily close, others will open; we must embrace every opportunity and work collaboratively to help each other through these difficult times.

This sense of compassion, this spirit of altruism could not have been more evident than just before half term when we held our second RGS Giving Day. I have spoken on numerous occasions about my commitment to full merit-based open access: that every bright student who earns his place can take it up, irrespective of financial circumstances or background. Inclusivity is at the forefront of our values; our grammar school roots mean that this philosophy is at the very heart of our community. We were founded in 1509 as a '*free schole*' for the benefit of bright local boys without means; our time as part of the state-maintained system from 1945 – 1977, when all boys attended for free, cemented that ethos in our culture.

Indeed, as we look to the complex challenges of the 21st century, one thing is clear to me. These challenges will only be solved with the collaboration of people across potential barriers of age, race, class and belief. Qualities such as resilience and perspective, the ability to work as a team and take appropriate risks will be the skills required by tomorrow's leaders: individuals who have the desire to make a difference. The fact that the young men who possess these attributes come from all parts of our society makes means-tested bursaries more important than ever – for all our futures.

Being generous at times of prosperity and positivity is one thing; to show such phenomenal kindness in such difficult times takes things to another level entirely. This virtual fundraising event raised funds for the RGS Bursary Programme to ensure that boys who are awarded an RGS place, but whose families are unable to pay some or all of the fees, are able to take up their places, as well as for the RGS Hardship Fund to help existing RGS boys keep their places if their families are hit by an unexpected financial crisis. This year, the RGS Giving Day was run along House lines with Old Guildfordians, parents, staff and students taking part and allocating their gift to their RGS House. Austen came out top with the highest number of donors and Powell topped the leaderboard for the most money raised. 25% of the student contribution to the recent mufti day was donated and, in total, over £100,000 was raised by the Giving Day. Altogether 1,278 staff, pupils, Old Guildfordians and parents donated: the highest number of donors to any school Giving Day in the UK!

Our recent telephone campaign, where a team of young Old Guildfordians called 1,000 members of our community to share our vision for the future and seek support, was similarly well received. Likewise, our wonderful Class of 2020 Bursary and those families who gifted their admissions deposit to our Hardship Fund have made a significant difference to the lives of others. In recent months, you have donated and pledged well over a quarter of a million pounds to help bright local boys with less opportunity and also to RGS families who are struggling. I am deeply humbled by your generosity: thank you.

The coming weeks are going to continue to require such flexibility and tenacity, kindness and compassion, reassurance and support. This week, our new team of Lower Sixth Form mentors went through a rigorous training programme to prepare them to support younger students, either academically or pastorally. The fact that we are inundated with applications for these important mentoring roles is just one illustration of the altruistic outlook which currently defines us. Whether it is senior students selflessly going out of their way to help junior students or the community digging deep in their pockets to support others, the RGS is a truly special environment which is determined to work collaboratively to make the very best of the current situation.

If I have learned anything about our community it is that the energy, cohesion and determination of the students, the staff, the governors, and the parents mean that anything, and everything, is in fact possible. Few could have predicted a year ago that our daily school routine would now revolve around handwashing, sanitising, wearing face coverings, social distancing, interacting remotely, moving along strict one-way routes and yet as I have walked the corridors of the RGS of this week, these are not the headlines which stand out for me. Laughter, animated discussion, and positivity continue to be prevalent and for this reason alone it is clear that we must do all we can to keep the boys in school and keep a beacon of positivity and energy shining brightly in the heart of Guildford.