



From the Headmaster

For many of us of a certain age, at least one of our weekend evenings used to revolve around *Blockbuster* video. Starting from humble origins with its first store in Dallas in 1985, by the mid-90s the distinctive blue and yellow, neon-lit stores were on every High Street with, at its peak, over 9,000 branches worldwide. *Blockbuster* – first with VHS and then DVD – brought the glamour of cinema directly into people's own homes, as well as enticing customers with irresistible offers of oversized bags of popcorn and bucket-sized tubs of ice-cream. As the catchy advert campaign promoted, "*Blockbuster Video. Wow! What a difference!*" As one of the most successful and recognisable global brands, *Blockbuster* seemed set to dominate the marketplace for years to come. However, in 2000, unwilling to innovate and deviate from their established formula, they turned down an opportunity to buy *Netflix*. With online streaming quickly becoming established, by 2010 *Blockbuster* was regarded as something of an outdated concept and, with profits plummeting, the company filed for bankruptcy. Today, in sadly cyclical fashion, the *Blockbuster* franchise has dwindled to just one single store in Oregon, which has, incidentally, been turned into an Airbnb.

One of the dangers of any brand – especially those which are established and successful – is to stagnate, to rest on its laurels. *Blockbuster* is widely regarded as a salutary lesson in what happens when companies don't adapt to a rapidly-changing world and landscape; the High Street is, regrettably, likewise full of such examples: *Debenhams*, *Cath Kidston*, *Laura Ashley*. The current climate has emphasised all the more the need for businesses, companies and institutions to be flexible, to be innovative, to be dynamic. It is important not to lose sight of what an institution stands for and what makes it distinctive but, equally, it is vital not to stand still: it is, after all, a flowing river rather than a stagnant pool which nourishes life and energy.

The last twelve months have undoubtedly been challenging for us all but what continues to excite me at the RGS is that far from just surviving we have been reflecting, planning and indeed thriving. Behind the scenes, we have worked extensively and strategically to consider many fundamental aspects of school life: student and staff wellbeing; diversity and inclusion; remote teaching and learning; mobile devices; widening access; review of the Third Form curriculum; reassessing the pastoral provision and PSHME programme; moving the whole Admissions process online; to name but a few. All of these initiatives will result in tangible benefits for our students and the results of these will become apparent in the coming months. As well as strategic elements, routine and operational aspects have also been considered: a willingness to radically refine the timetable and timings of the school day is just one example of a community which is willing to think on its feet, to make sensible changes, and to keep the students' best interests at the very heart of our decision-making process.

I am very proud of the RGS – of what our students and staff continue to achieve – but I am also very proud to be part of an institution which, as I have said before, is in the best possible way restless. This week's announcement from the government is exciting and we cannot wait to have the corridors and classrooms of the School filled once again with the energy, enthusiasm and noise of the boys. The boys, however, will not be returning to a school which has stagnated in their absence, far from it.

An ancient Chinese proverb notes, “*When the winds of change blow, some people build walls and others build windmills.*” We will make sure that as we continue to come to terms with the challenges of the twenty-first century the RGS innovates, develops strategically and builds windmills so that each and every change is for the benefit of the boys and, hopefully, justifies the comment, “*Wow! What a difference!*”

Latest News

Author Visits: We were delighted to welcome two inspiring authors to talk to our boys remotely. Author, DJ and reggae lyricist Alex Wheatle shared his powerful, inspirational journey to becoming an award-winning author. His talk was full of really pertinent messages with regard to overcoming adversity, self-improvement, and believing in your own abilities. In addition, author, slam poet and comedian Harry Baker then shared his experiences of becoming the youngest ever Poetry World Slam Champion, providing fantastic advice for aspiring performance poets.

Environment: **Aradhya Soneja** (L6) attended the inaugural UK Eco Schools meeting. As part of the School's commitment to sustainability and the environment, this cemented the RGS's place within the country's ever-growing eco network. Aradhya summarised the purpose of the group eloquently in his opening statement: calling for strength in numbers to help tackle the climate change conundrum. It is the hope that the network will continue to grow throughout the country, encouraging young people to take change-making action. This provides a vital first step in raising awareness on environmental issues in our school communities and more broadly within the local community.

King's Lecture: We were delighted to welcome entrepreneur Chika Russell to deliver a talk entitled *Overcoming diversity and becoming included*. She told the story of her journey: the influence of her African childhood and the time spent with family and friends sharing food, to the launch of *CHIKA'S* snacks which encapsulate *Iyanu*, the Nigerian word for *amazing*. As she noted, her consumers are taken on a taste adventure which is full of flavour, joy and *Iyanu* goodness. In addition, she described her passionate support for girls' education through *World Vision*, helping the girls of today to become the strong women of tomorrow. Chika spoke of the importance of tenacity and resilience, of the centrality of diversity, inclusion and equity, as she noted: “Diversity provides the scope to express the talents and interests of many and this makes society more complete, open, innovative and progressive.”

Science: **Matt Gray** (L6) won first prize in the University of Gloucester 2020 Bioscience Essay Competition with an essay entitled, *It's never been more important to be a biologist than now*, with a persuasive, sophisticated and convincing argument.

University: As we reach the business end of this year's university admissions cycle, the School can already reflect on another successful year with nearly 500 offers having already been made and decisions on a further 120 applications still to be advised. Among those universities making the highest number of offers so far are Exeter (65), Nottingham (50), Bristol (45), Bath (41), Durham (30), Warwick (30) and Leeds (28). These are in addition to the 18 Oxbridge offers that were confirmed at the beginning of the month (13 to Cambridge and 5 to Oxford). As always, the courses to which boys have applied are wide-ranging with an equal focus on both STEM and Arts and Humanities courses. There have also been applications to degree courses less well travelled by RGS students in recent years including Acting and Stage Combat, Criminology, Ecology and Conservation, Global Sustainable Development and Politics with Quantitative Research Methods.