

Our Ref: PJS/LRS

28 September 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I thought I'd just outline to you how this term has started and outline our plans for this term and beyond.

The staff and students have adapted well to the changed routines of school and are respectful of the zones. The catering staff have met the challenge of having five different serving points and the teachers are keeping up their step count as they move around the classrooms for lessons. I am really happy to report that the students' behaviour on return has been superb, and classrooms are generally more focused than ever which is really great to see. The uniform is looking great and we have managed to nail the trainers problem too. Thank you to all the parents who have had those battles at home to get their child into the right shoes, it helps us massively and creates a culture of compliance with rules which goes much further than just uniform.

Over the last ten days we've had two visitors who have toured the lessons. One was the Chair of Governors who has obviously known the school for a while. She came round on a Friday Period 6, for probably the least good walkround I'd done all week, however she was impressed with how calm and purposeful it was compared to previous experiences of the school. I had a visit from an SLT member from Court Moor who has only ever worked in good and outstanding schools and he was really impressed with what he saw in terms of behaviour, friendliness of students and teaching quality. We are working closely with the County who I am inviting in on an almost monthly basis to monitor what we are doing and provide that outside validation of the changes taking place. As part of this support an inspector interviewed all our curriculum leaders about their plans for the departments and the curriculum and the feedback was really strong. It feels like things are really on track and I have to say the students really seem on board with the changes.

As we move into winter it is going to be more challenging to keep warm with windows open. We've resigned ourselves to having the heating on and the windows open, however can I encourage you to get your children to wear layers. A vest or white t-shirt under their shirt will give them that crucial additional warmth, if then they get too warm I don't mind them taking their jumpers off, but I'd rather they wear an under-layer rather than students making their extra layer a coat. Very early on I battled students not wearing coats in lessons so I don't want to go back to that, a coat indicates that they are partially involved and might not be staying in the lesson! I don't want to be getting into arguments with children who are cold and are trying to wear coats, they need that layer underneath and I would appreciate your support on this.

One focus for this year is creating a sense of 'belonging' for students. This is about improving the range of extra-curricular activities, creating more spaces for students in the school, improving our work on diversity to ensure every student feels part of the community and driving on anti-bullying. We are running a survey with students on extra-curricular this week to see what they would like and, once some of the

Covid-19 restrictions are through, we are hoping to create a vibrant programme. If there are any parents who would be interested in volunteering to run any kind of activity then (subject to relevant H&S and safeguarding checks) then I would be really interested to hear from you.

Along the same lines we are looking for parent help in the Learning Resource Centre (Library) to help with boosting reading across the school. We are looking for volunteers to re-shelve books, to create book boxes for different year groups and potentially listen to students read. Please do get in touch if you are able to volunteer to assist with this.

You will know that we've changed the logo and that will result in changing the logo on uniforms. This will roll out next academic year, but please don't worry that you'll have a huge bill – we will let it happen over time so there will be no compulsory switch. We will take the opportunity to review the uniform and I will be asking opinions of parents and students to feed into any recommendation I make to the governors. Parental views are really important, you know things like how well things wash or last and that is important. Please be reassured that we'll take your views into account when we look at it and I'll keep you updated.

We have been running virtual open evenings which are a challenge because so many people in the community think they know what Aldworth is like because of the reputation, which isn't very helpful. Ideally we would bring people round on tours to see the school in action which would be the best way to counter their beliefs, however I'm not prepared to bring a range of different people into the school site and potentially threaten the health of our students and staff. I understand some members of the community may begrudge that, but if you pick up on that then please just emphasise the reasoning – your children's wellbeing is more important to this school than recruiting loads of students for next year – and I would hope that would show a potential parent about where our values lie.

For open evening we have produced a range of videos, but if you have ten minutes spare then I'd recommend you have a look at these. The first one is a student video, where we pulled a few random students into the library and asked them to talk about how Aldworth has changed. If I'm honest, I wasn't sure if they notice much, however the results were quite heart-warming and it's worth seeing what they feel is different:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CEDx-SuvHDo&feature=youtu.be>

The second video is of the staff, which shows what dedicated staff we have and why they choose to work at Aldworth. Many people will conclude (as I mistakenly did before I arrived) that a double RI school would be full of teachers who were trapped, didn't care and were desperate to get out. That's simply not the case and this video shows the motivation of this great set of teachers really well:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zmtVmuNKBww&feature=youtu.be>

Just to remind you, we have an INSET day this Friday. We are going to be discussing what gaps students have returned with and planning how to fill them, planning in the event of another lockdown (see later), work on how to help students to develop excellent classroom behaviours and some work around diversity for LGBTQ+ students. I understand that INSET days can be a pain in terms of childcare, however hopefully you can see how these items all feed into our priorities and will help to continue the momentum of change.

At Court Moor we had our first Covid-19 case last week, so this gave us a great opportunity to run through our procedures as we have the same at Aldworth. I'm really pleased to say that it all went well and the student was suitably kept at home, we tracked and traced within the school and those students were asked to quarantine however there appears to have been no other student or staff member infected from this incident. Should we have a case at Aldworth we will follow the same model and try to keep school as similar as possible for students. If we find ourselves in the situation that we have a couple of cases then we may well ask students to wear masks in corridors for a period. Officially we don't have to do that until the government declare the area high-risk, however I think it would be good to do if we felt there was a particular risk at school. Most schools target corridors because that's where children cross with others from outside their bubble and therefore are at risk from cross-contamination, because of our zoning we don't have this issue at Aldworth luckily.

We all await nervously to see if there is going to be another lockdown, there has been talk of extending the half term break for the so called 'circuit break' so we are planning for this eventuality. If it is just one week of school missed then we will fall back into using Show My Homework as before. We will however try experimenting with videos and live-streaming with Year 11 in order to try and further improve our offer in case of an extended lock down. Feedback from County shows that Zoom live lessons have not been effective and schools are having to re-teach things they did in those lessons - anyone whose sat through long zoom meetings will know its deathly effect. We still have issues around families who have no, or limited, access to technology and it's really important that we don't put families into a position where they feel their children are missing out. The plan is for us to explore ideas on the INSET day and have a plan, we would trial it with Year 11 and then move down quickly to Year 10. In the event of school closure or a longer lockdown, we would then iron out the issues before trying to move it down to lower school. The most likely scenario would be recorded starter to lessons from the teachers, we will experiment with live streaming, although I am reluctant to have them only available in real time because a family with one laptop, a parent working at home and two children could be faced with unfair decisions. Really, I just want you to know that we are thinking about things and looking to improve what we do where we can.

This morning I've done a walk around and I was very pleased with what I saw, the climate in the Year 10 and 11 classrooms would not have been out of place at Court Moor, and that's not something I thought I'd be able to say for a number of years. Although we have all the additional restrictions of Covid-19 we are not standing still and we are determined to keep the improvement of the school driving throughout the year. Thank you for your continued support and encouragement.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P Jenkins', written in a cursive style.

Mr P Jenkins  
**Headteacher**