

WEEK 1 -Friday 10 September 2021

I am writing this - my first Blog of the new school year - on Thursday afternoon, having just seen our last students leave the site. Today has been the first time that we have had all of our students in the school following the staggered start and it has been marvellous to welcome them back.

And it has been busy!

With another full year group entering into Year 7 this year and growing numbers into the Sixth Form too, we have over a hundred more students in our school than we did last year. Of course, that is a great position for our school to be in as it creates the financial security that allows us to fund our continued development both in terms of infrastructure and the staff group. This year, we have welcomed 15 new colleagues to our school and our growing reputation has enabled us to buck the national and regional trend in terms of teacher recruitment. We have managed to attract teachers from other schools who are looking for new opportunities as well as snapping up some of the best talent amongst local teacher training providers. They make up a really strong new team that will complement and refresh our existing staff body.

Of course, the success of any school is due to the students and, for that reason, I am always keen to thank them for what they do to make our school what it is. And I also fully appreciate the support we receive from our parents, especially during the past difficult 18 months.

Which brings me to the issue of Covid testing. Whilst many of the covid-safety measures have disappeared from our schools and workplaces, regular LFD testing remains one of the best ways in which our community can wrestle with the virus. We have conducted a significant number of tests this week as students have returned and the negative tests that the overwhelming majority of students have produced is great reassurance for them, their families and friends. Likewise, the handful of positive tests that have arisen have also helped us to prevent transmission in our school. Those students will now isolate for 10 days.

As the rules change on the matter of isolation, please let me remind you that we will no longer be handling track and trace if a student tests positive. Any student who tests positive needs to isolate and report the matter to the NHS who will conduct any tracing that is required. This will mean far fewer students being required to isolate due to a potential contact in school which we hope will reduce the huge disruptions that we faced last year.

We will continue to offer all students free packs of LFD tests and we urge you to support us by regularly testing your child so that we can prevent any wider transmission in our school.

I had my own bout with the virus during the summer as, despite being double vaccinated, I came down with symptoms in early August which I immediately knew was an indication of Covid. A test quickly confirmed that to be the case and I was confined to isolate away from the rest of my family for 10 long days! Sadly, I missed the GCSE and A Level Results Days and the Year 11 and 13 Proms. That was a real blow although there were plenty of other staff on hand to make all of those events a real week of success.

Thankfully, my family and I emerged from isolation in time to enjoy something of a summer and we enjoyed a week in Surrey as well as a week in Cumbria, taking in a few concerts and cricket matches along the way. I know that the weather was pretty miserable for most of

August but I hope that you managed to spend some time with your families enjoying the 'summer'.

I will end with a final point about uniform. As a school, we are firmly committed to the values that are underpinned by a quality uniform and we will never shake from that. It is probably no secret to you that maintaining uniform standards is one of the hardest things for any school to do. If you have ever wrangled with your son or daughter about what they have chosen to wear, imagine doing that every day in a school with over 1200 students in it!

Nevertheless, our uniform standards are very high, thanks to you and your young people and our job is made much easier because of that. As we strive to raise standards and consistency even further, this week has seen some students (and, may I say, one or two parents) challenge our standards and our expectations. This has caused some students to have to go home to get changed before starting school and some students to sit out a day working in the reflection room. Our pastoral staff have worked tirelessly to ensure that all students and parents have been supported to get the uniform right and I thank them for that. They have done a remarkable job this week. Once again, thank you to all of you parents who have supported us by making those uniform adjustments where necessary and ensuring that the young people can focus on learning and enjoying their time in school. You make our school what it is.

Take care and have a lovely weekend.

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 2 - Friday 17 September 2021

"Nadhim Zahawi is the new Education Secretary. Well he can't be any worse can he?" read the text that my wife sent to me on Wednesday afternoon following the Cabinet reshuffle.

If your main qualification for a top cabinet post is that you're not as bad as the previous incumbent it shows just how far our expectations of political leadership have fallen in recent years. To be fair to Mr Zahawi, I do not know much about him except that he seems to have done a good job with the vaccine rollout, to the extent that it is actually his responsibility, that is. Anyway, it is good to see the back of Gavin Williamson, that's for sure.

Whilst some will argue that Michael Gove was less popular with the sector, you could not accuse Gove of lacking ambition and he presided over some of the most radical changes in decades during his four years in charge. It will take some time for the verdict to be reached on whether they were worth the wholesale disruption they caused but, in the case of Williamson, the verdict is already in. He was a shocker.

Just consider some of the things that we have to contend with as a consequence of the shambolic functioning of the DfE over the past few years:

- At the start of the pandemic, there was a total absence of direction on the subject of home teaching resulting in long delays to the delivery of laptops and devices
- U-turns on the provision of free school meals for children during the holidays

- In June 2020, promising parents that primary schools would reopen with half class sizes and then realising that we would need twice as many classrooms to accommodate them
- The utter fiasco of the summer 2020 exam grading process
- In December 2020, threatening legal action on schools which closed early to keep their children safe
- On the last day before the Christmas break, announcing that schools would be carrying out tests on site by the start of January but providing no guidance on how it would happen. The tests didn't take place until March
- Insisting on the last day of the Christmas holidays that schools were safe to reopen but then closing them all after one day
- Long delays before information was revealed about the exam grading system for summer 2021

I share this reminder of what has gone on just to emphasise what a remarkable job has been done by everyone else except the Department that is supposed to lead our sector. In the absence of clear leadership, schools, students and parents have instead stepped up and just got on with it ourselves. We have tolerated the confusion and the U-turns and done what is best for our young people. When we look back on the pandemic and the impact on schools, we will not remember Gavin Williamson but will reflect on the work that we all did to keep things going.

As we reach the end of the second week, we are working hard to ensure that students have the very best experience of the school site. There have been many changes for students to contend with as we have relaxed our covid measures, whilst simultaneously coping with more students on site and a new firm of caterers. This has caused some problems and there have been occasions when some students have not been able to access their preferred choice of food. I apologise that this is the case and can assure you that we are doing our best to make things run as smoothly as possible. Our caterers are monitoring the take up of menu items and we have made some adjustments to the flow of students around the site. Thank you for your support and we continue to thank our students for their excellent behaviour and resilience.

Finally, today I wrote to all parents with a statement making clear our position on the vaccine rollout for 12-15 year olds. This statement has been written collectively by our Trust and Headteachers and makes clear the role that schools will play in the vaccine programme. If you haven't seen it yet, it can be found [here](#).

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 3 - Friday 24 September 2021

Yesterday evening I wrote to all parents to explain the new measures that we have introduced to tackle an increase in the number of positive Covid cases that we are experiencing in school and this morning I have spoken to all students to outline the same to

them. It was great to see so many students coming into school already with their own face covering and, for those that didn't have them, more than happy to take one from us and wear it as requested. It was quite something to see our students so willing to support others by making these small adjustments to their lives. Hopefully this, along with other measures, will see our case numbers drop again and we can review whether this is necessary in a couple of weeks.

One of the consequences of this uptick in cases has been an incredible increase in work for our Attendance team. Ordinarily, each morning they would deal with around 50 or so students who are absent from school, listening to messages, making and receiving calls to parents. We have always felt it was very important to contact parents swiftly as soon as your child is recorded as absent, even though this is not standard practice in all secondary schools. This week, their daily contact log has been close to 200 and this has meant a delay in informing some parents of your child's absence. If this affected you, I apologise for the inconvenience and hope you understand the reason why. We are addressing this by increasing the staffing capacity of the team as well as looking into how we can use SIMS Parent to communicate absence. Nevertheless there will still be some challenges and we will endeavour to return your call or contact you if your child is absent but this may not be as immediate as we would like. Please continue to stress the importance of good attendance with your child.

We are still waiting to hear from our local Public Health teams about the vaccine roll out for 12-15 year olds. Once we have specific information on when this will take place and how it will work, I will contact you. Please be assured that you will be kept fully informed about this programme as I know there are a range of views on this matter.

We are all aware of the pressures that the UK supply chain is facing at the moment and this is now beginning to creep into school. This morning, I met with our catering manager who has outlined the problems that she is facing both in terms of securing stock and also with staffing. At this stage, we are still able to provide a full break and lunch service for all students but the team is finding it very difficult to offer the full range of items and so this may affect the choice available to students for a period of time. We are working with our Trust and the Catering Contractor, ABM, to secure enough stock but so is every other school which is only adding to the supply chain pressures.

We will explain this to students and your support and patience is appreciated.

Finally, let me end on a high note. On Wednesday morning, I led the weekly assembly for Year 9 students. This year, we have raised the bar of expectation with our students and expect them to file into assembly in silence and wait respectfully for their peers to enter and be seated. We then greet one another formally and politely. They did this impeccably and then, as they listened to our school nurse introducing herself and her work, they sat attentively and respectfully throughout a minor ICT glitch showing exceptional manners. Mr Leckenby and Mrs Newman, the Year leaders were incredibly impressed and showered them with praise. This standard is expected of all students and all year groups are rising to the challenge but Year 9 this week raised the bar even further.

This has been a difficult week in school. We are all royally fed up of this virus now and are desperate to get back to something like normal but moments like the one I have described still make us smile and focus on more positive times ahead.

Take care and have a lovely weekend.

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 4 - Friday 1 October 2021

Yesterday evening I had the great privilege of welcoming prospective Year 6 pupils and their parents to our school. Our Open evening is always a real highlight of our calendar; a chance for us to show off the best of our school. This year - for obvious, very-bored-of-it-now, reasons - we had to limit the extent of the tour and ask parents to book a slot. Despite this, we were delighted to welcome almost 200 families to our school over the course of a wonderful (albeit long) night.

It was great to welcome them but equally pleasing that so many of our current students (over a hundred of them) volunteered to stay after school to help out, acting as tour guides, demonstrators or performing their music, dance and art. That so many of them wished to participate for no more than a sandwich and a bun speaks volumes about the pride they have in their school.

New parents now have until the end of October to apply for a place and we will learn by December of the number of applications. This information then allows us to assess our staffing needs for the year ahead. We have been fortunate in the past couple of years to recruit some very talented colleagues to our school and, by starting early again, we hope that will continue.

This week, I have spent some time in our morning Assemblies and, along with our students, celebrated European Day of Languages. There are over thirty different languages spoken by students and staff in our diverse school community and we heard some of them spoken by our staff during these assemblies, including Mrs Davison (who is from Poland), Mrs Groak (who, before marrying the Headteacher, used to live in Spain and now teaches French and Spanish) and from Mrs Taylor, who bravely demonstrated some of her O Level French (although she reckoned most of it came from 'Only Fools and Horses!'). We are incredibly proud of our languages curriculum and I have also heard excitedly from some of our Year 8 students who are enjoying learning about Mexican culture whilst simultaneously learning Spanish.

Our initial problems with technology and food seem to have abated as we come to the end of Week Four. A week ago, our canteen staff were running short on supplies and had to be quite creative with the published menu; now, it seems that things have steadied somewhat. However, there are still challenges for all catering and hospitality organisations due to the nation-wide supply chain issues and so please bear with them if we are unable to deliver our published menu for students every day.

Likewise, the ParentPay admin team is reporting to us that their problems appear to be fixed and we are certainly seeing fewer problems reported to us by students and parents. If you do encounter any problems with loading up or using your child's account, please contact the finance team on 01482 469838.

Finally, the suppliers of our communications system 'SIMS Parent' have recently changed their name from Capita to ESS and we are learning from parents that messages from them

are being filtered into junk mail rather than your inbox. Please ensure ESS is added as a safe sender in your inbox and you should continue to receive communications from us.

The first month of a new Academic Year is intensely busy for students and staff alike and yet despite some of the challenges detailed above and the continuation of 'you-know-what', we are delighted with the way in which students have returned to - or started - school. Our young people are showing incredible resilience in the face of so many difficulties and we should all be very proud of them.

Thank you for your support with our reintroduction of face coverings. The compliance with this has been exceptionally high and, as we reach the end of the week, the trend in terms of reported cases is already beginning to go down. We are far from the end of this pandemic so it is reassuring that our community is prepared to flex and adapt as we make changes in response to the situation we find ourselves in. Which brings me to the subject of the vaccination programme. We have been informed by the company contracted to provide the vaccines that they will not now be able to start the programme next week and instead we have accepted their alternative dates of 8, 9 and 17 November. This is available to children who are aged 12 to 15 on the 8 November and we will be in touch shortly with more information on the consent process.

Finally, a confession to perhaps put a smile on your face. Just before Open Evening yesterday, I walked over to the sports field opposite our school to watch our Year 7 football team playing their first game of the season against Wolfreton. My son happened to be playing in the game - for Wolfreton. As I stood on the touchline watching the game and urging on Hessle, my son broke through and played a wonderful pass into the path of his teammate who slotted it home. In my excitement I punched the air, only to remember that I was there to support Hessle. Oops.

As I write this on the first day of October, through my office window I can see glints of sun, rolling clouds and swaying trees. It is Autumn. Despite everything else going on in our crazy world, it is reassuring to see the arrival of such typically seasonal weather. Whatever you are doing this weekend, stay warm, dry and safe and enjoy the company of your loved ones.

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 5 - Friday 8 October 2021

This morning I met with officials from the local Public Health team and from the East Riding local authority to discuss the current Covid situation in our area. A little over two weeks ago, we experienced a dramatic increase in the number of positive cases being recorded, especially amongst Year 11 students. As you know, this prompted us to instigate elements of our contingency plan, including the re-introduction of face coverings in communal areas. I am pleased to be able to inform you that the compliance with this has been extremely high. Since this and other measures were introduced, we have seen a steady decline in numbers back to the pre-spike level. This is reassuring. However, we are still seeing positive cases reported to us each day and, as we enter the colder months and as Hull Fair is set to begin, we have made the decision to retain the use of face coverings until the half term break in two weeks time. We hope that this will give us an additional layer of protection, with minimal cost or inconvenience to staff and students. We will of course review this at half term. Thank

you once again for your support with these measures and in general over our management of the pandemic in our school.

Yesterday afternoon was our first all-year-group Meet The Tutor event. Whenever we introduce new events such as this, a great deal of planning and discussion takes place in advance. However, until it happens we really do not know how it will run, how it will land with staff and parents or what the general feedback will be. But, if we don't try new things, we will never continue to improve. The rationale for Meet The Tutor is that the tutor is the constant presence in your child's school life - they are the one adult who they see every day, at the start of each day and as such they play a crucial part in ensuring they are happy in school. Given the changes we have made to our pastoral system in the past eighteen months and the pandemic, we felt it was important that you be introduced face to face (even if on a screen) so that you know who your child's tutor is. These meetings are in addition to the normal Parents Evenings which will still take place later this year. In order that staff could potentially see all parents from their tutor group, we limited the online discussions to three minutes, a duration which we are conscious is not long but should be sufficient for brief introductions. Any deeper concerns could then be followed up.

In the event, nearly six hundred parents joined us for these meetings but we are aware that a number of parents who booked appointments did not make their appointments. In order to find out whether that was due to technical difficulties or that parents did not feel it was worth it, we don't know. However, in order to improve this for the next time, we have sent you a short survey which can be found [here](#) to find out your views. Please take a couple of minutes to help us to improve this event in future as well providing some feedback to a few other questions.

This week, you may have seen that the city centre of Hull has been turned into a movie set for the filming of Enola Holmes 2. On Tuesday evening, after dropping my son at football training, I went for a run and headed in that direction to check it out. It really was quite impressive to see how they had transformed High Street and Land of Green Ginger into Victorian London. At Hessle, we have all been particularly interested in this movie as one of our staff members was all set to appear in it. Kirsty Simpson is a member of our English department and has long harboured thespian ambitions. She recently had a small part in another film which was shot in Hull and was all set to do likewise in the Enola movie but eventually was prevented from doing so when she was struck down with Covid. Nevertheless, we were delighted that one of our colleagues had such a fascinating interest and hobby and she is not alone. We really do have a talented body of staff beyond the classroom.

Recently, English teacher Garry Burnett appeared in his Mick Ronson-inspired show 'Turn and Face the Strange' at Hull Truck Theatre, which he also wrote. In that show was yet another member of our English department, Annabel Etheridge, who sang lead vocals. Garry is also a much-published author of educational books as well as children's literature. Writing, it seems, is a common interest. I myself have had two sports books published, with a third scheduled for 2022, and Ben Shepherd and Monika Davison (both English, yet again) also have published works.

Elsewhere, Jordan Douglas combines working in the PE department with being the Goalkeeper for North Ferriby FC, whilst Geography teacher, Chris Adams, represents Beverley FC. In other sport, our Attendance Officer, Tina Brown is an ultra marathon runner who dominates the ladies divisions in most of her races (some of which are 80 miles plus!).

Finally, some of you who follow local politics may remember Carl Minns who, between 2006 and 2011, was the leader of Hull City Council. Since leaving politics, Carl has entered teaching and joined us in September 2020 as a Maths teacher.

We always tell the students to throw themselves into their hobbies and interests and to follow their passions. The pastimes of these colleagues shows that we also lead by example.

Many of you will be heading off to Hull Fair over the weekend and it appears that the weather is going to be fine for it. We are giving it a miss this year and I am hoping that my own children won't notice it is on! That might be wishful thinking but, if you are heading to Walton Street, have fun, please stay safe and have a lovely weekend.

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 6 - Friday 15 October 2021

Last week, I wrote to inform you of the significant improvement in our covid situation following our reintroduction of face coverings at the end of last month. This week has been a much quieter one on that front and we have seen an 80% decline in the number of cases reported each week. There could be many reasons for this but the one significant action that we have taken has been the wearing of face coverings and the local Public Health team are convinced that this will have made a big contribution to the reduction. For that reason, we have continued to require students and staff to wear them in communal spaces and thank you for your ongoing support with this.

Another of the best ways in which we can continue to control the spread of the virus is through regular LFD testing. We know that so much transmission is caused by people who do not know that they have the virus. Regular testing can help to identify when you may be positive and help to break that chain of infection. Sadly, the proportion of students taking home test kits has fallen and, from speaking to students, we know that far fewer of them are testing regularly. Please support us with this and help your child to get into the regular habit of testing on Sunday and Wednesday evenings.

The pandemic has affected everyone of us but it has also brought out the best of us at times. The appreciation that we have received for our work from parents and other members of the community has been really touching at times and spurs us on to do our very best for our students and families. To any parent who has taken the time to share their gratitude, a very big 'thank you' - it really does mean a great deal.

On the other hand, it is a real downside of working in public life that we also see the worst of people. People do not work in schools for the money or even for the holidays; they do it for the satisfaction of working with young people and doing a job that has real value and purpose. It is incredibly frustrating, and even deeply depressing, for me when I hear of my staff being abused in their work. This does not happen regularly, but it is often enough to be a concern. What do I mean by 'abuse'? Well, it is not uncommon for parents and carers to swear at my staff, or to shout at them or send emails that are downright rude and sometimes abusive. Often this is over a disagreement over a school policy, a detention, a uniform issue; sometimes it is when we have made a mistake and are trying to put it right.

No matter what the cause of the situation might be, there is never an excuse for rude or abusive behaviour and it is almost always counter-productive. We are trying to teach young people how to handle heated situations and, as adults, we must always model best behaviours, especially when in front of the children.

I was reluctant to share this with you as I am really only referring to a very small proportion of our parents. Nevertheless, it is useful for everyone to know the pressures that our staff sometimes face and how proud I am of their steadfastness in continuing to support families despite the occasional four letter word!

Yesterday evening was our Year 10 Parent Information Evening and over 140 people attended over three sessions to hear a presentation from a number of senior staff. The purpose of the event, which was similar to the Year 11 event a few weeks ago, is to provide the information we think you need to support your child, in this case in Year 10. We outlined the timeline to GCSE exams, the careers support that is available and the importance of good attendance. I will pick up the attendance issue further next week but, in the meantime, for those of you unable to attend, the slide set can be found here.

Finally, as I write this the sun is shining once again and a pleasant weekend beckons. If you are heading to Hull Fair please do so safely. Whatever your plans may be, I hope you have a relaxing weekend.

Best regards

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 7 - Friday 22 October 2021

As we reach the end of this first half term of the school year, it is appropriate to reflect on the achievements of the past seven weeks.

On return to school on 6 September, we were delighted to welcome another full year group of Year 7 students. Two-hundred and fifty excited eleven year olds joined us that week and it was a pleasure to meet them. In the days and weeks that followed, they settled in extremely well, found their way around the building and brought real enthusiasm and energy to their learning. They have coped with everything that has been thrown at them and handled it with maturity and aplomb. As I have explained to you a few times, there have been a few challenges over lunchtime this year as we have settled in a new catering company, and our youngest students have needed the most support with this. I am on duty everyday in the canteen and can clearly see a more efficient service now and that the children have plenty of time to eat and the full range of choice. I hope that we are now providing them, and you, with a service that they expect but please continue to inform us and challenge us if that is not the case.

Our older students, especially those in Year 8 and 9, have enjoyed the benefit of a full curriculum now that they are able to move around the building to Science and Tech labs, Art rooms and the like. They are excellent role models for our younger children and their resilience in dealing with the unpredictability of schooling since March 2020 is commendable.

Which brings me to our GCSE students in Years 10 and 11. We have held two Parents Information Evenings this term, at which we have set out our plans to support these students. The key message I have tried to get across is that there is no point in worrying about what has happened; the future is all that counts. The pandemic has caused a break in learning - but it has affected everyone. So, if everyone is behind, essentially nobody is behind! There is huge experience and expertise in the school and the children will continue to benefit from this, of course, and there will still be the same number of Grade 3s, 4s, 7s, 9s and so on available when they come to sit their exams, just as the world will still need engineers, doctors, care workers, mechanics, plumbers, teachers, shop assistants. The world has changed but the opportunities are still there waiting to be seized. That is our message to our students, and we believe it.

The world, and our country, also needs great people; those who are innovative and hard working and who have great character, who tell the truth and look after others. Those are the kind of people we are trying to develop at our school and, after seven weeks of interacting and working with our young people, I believe that is what we are doing. The high standards we are striving to set every day are bearing fruit; uniform has never been smarter, attendance is above national average and the record of behavioural incidents is well down on previous years. This is all being achieved by our highly committed staff, employing consistent approaches and working hard with students to teach the behaviours we wish to see. You will rarely hear shouting in our school; when a child makes a mistake, we prefer our adults to explain things through with them and reiterate our values and our standards. It is working.

Some people challenge me on this and ask 'what has uniform / hair colour got to do with learning?' It is a fair question but I would answer it like this....

Every day I wear a suit to work. A tie and black shoes. It takes me seconds to choose my suit and tie and that is it. If I wasn't wearing a suit to work, it would take me longer to decide what to wear. I would have to consider how my clothes might match or not, whether they were appropriate for who I was going to meet. I would need to think about what others might wear and whether I might be over or under dressed. All of these thoughts and decisions would be an unnecessary distraction from what I have ahead of me that day. During the day, crucial minutes might be wasted talking about what I, or others, were wearing. I might spend time comparing myself favourably or, more likely, unfavourably with others, hitting my self esteem. It would all be a waste of time.

Wearing school uniform protects children, usually far more impressionable than I am, from that kind of worry, concern and effort. That is why we insist on school uniform, worn to a common standard.

Tomorrow afternoon, my family and I are flying to Spain. I cannot wait. It has been two years since I have been abroad and I am even excited about parking my car at the airport and getting on the shuttle bus. It is a bit ridiculous really. We have five days planned in Barcelona and, miraculously, have managed to get tickets for the Barca v Real Madrid game on Sunday. Our children will get to experience a city that my wife and I have visited many times and love to bits. Whilst sitting in the sun, with a glass of wine and some tapas, I will recharge after a busy half term but look forward with real optimism to the rest of the school year; it is such a privilege to be the Headteacher of this school and to lead such a great team of people dedicated to serve our young people and their families. Thank you for all of the support you have given to your children, to my staff and to the school these past seven weeks and I hope you enjoy some quality family time.

Take care and stay safe

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 8 - Friday 5 November 2021

“Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see” - Neil Postman

At the start of this week, The Queen addressed the COP26 Leaders and drew on this memorable quote when reminding them of their obligation to make the brave decisions that would protect the planet and the safety and prosperity of our future generations.

I love this quote and its shocking simplicity. As a Headteacher, it really speaks to the importance of the work that we do every day in school. We are not just preparing students for examinations - as important as they are - we are truly developing a generation of people who we hope are going to make the world a better place. I really believe in that and there are many times when I have more faith in our younger generation than I do in my own. Our students are astonishing in their resilience, in their positivity but also in their sense of fairness and justice.

As parents, you will all know how attuned teenagers are to unfairness or even a whiff of it. I see it everyday - if I ask a student to correct a minor uniform indiscretion, they will follow the instruction but they will make absolutely sure I am picking up the next student just as keenly. And they will let me know about it if I don't! And rightly so. It is so important that rules, laws or expectations should be the same for everyone. That is the basis of a just society and why it is so outrageous when our political leaders are seen to be following a 'one rule for them but no rules for us' agenda. The little things matter; we ask our students to take off their outdoor coats when they enter the building and so, as adults, we do the same. And we remind each other politely if we forget. It is all part of showing that high standards are important but that we are all in it together and that we sometimes just need a reminder of our obligation to those standards.

Respect and kindness. These are the attitudes we want our young people to have; these are the messages we wish to send to a time we will not see.

The return to school this week has been a very positive one. Thank you for supporting us with the continuation of the face coverings. There have been much fewer Covid cases in school again this week and so the face coverings will continue for the foreseeable future. A small price to pay for our collective safety, we believe.

Next week is Year 9 Parents Information Evening and an opportunity for you to hear about the year ahead for students in that year group. Year 9 will obviously see the start of the GCSE Options Pathway process so there is much to share with you; please check your emails and make your bookings - I think it will be an hour of your time well spent. And it will be great to see you.

Finally, following a difficult half term, our overall school attendance is ticking upwards each day and I am pleased to say that it is now above the national average. We have spent a lot of time reflecting on the issue of attendance in recent months and it is true that for some vulnerable students and their families, it has been difficult to return to school. Nevertheless,

the impact of poor attendance is substantial both in terms of academic achievement but also the lack of development of social skills.

Just one day of absence means that a student has missed five hours of learning. That may not seem like much but, on their return, it may take up to a week for them to recover as each time they return to each of those missed subjects, there will be disruption and anxiety as the student tries to 'catch up' or deal with the lost learning or experience. On top of this, one day of absence is also a loss of social contact - friends are talking about new things and the social confidence is diminished.

As Headteacher, I am very proud of the incredible work that my staff do every day. They can really inspire the students and enable them to do great things. But only if they're here. As we hopefully get back to normal in the coming months, I hope we can work ever more closely with you to improve our attendance even further. When the students are in school, that is when the magic happens.

Take care

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 9 - Friday 12 November 2021

"It's Not Banter" - that is the slogan with which we will be launching a new campaign to address discrimination over the coming weeks.

Every school is its own community and in many ways it is also a microcosm of society at large. Our school is no different and I am hugely proud of our diverse and vibrant community...

"It's Not Banter" - that is the slogan with which we will be launching a new campaign to address discrimination over the coming weeks.

Every school is its own community and in many ways it is also a microcosm of society at large. Our school is no different, and I am hugely proud of our diverse and vibrant community. But with diversity comes challenge. It is incumbent upon us as leaders to ensure that all members of our community respect the differences that they see every day and, as much as possible, use those differences to learn from one another and enrich their own lives. It is also our duty to ensure that those who are vulnerable to discrimination are not only protected from it, but that we do our best to understand what it is like to face discrimination in whatever form.

As a white, able-bodied, heterosexual man, I have never faced any discrimination in my life. I grew up in a stable home. We weren't well off, but I never considered that we were poor. My parents did manual work and never went to university. I did and, although I am incredibly grateful for my education, I didn't feel privileged. When I entered teaching, I was racked with self-doubt. As a headteacher, I feel the full force of imposter syndrome on a regular basis. And yet, the more that I have read and tried to understand about discrimination, I have begun to realise that my life has been blessed in part because of those bits of my life that would have traditionally been classed as 'normal'. I can walk dark streets at night and not worry

about sexual abuse or violence; I can travel wherever I want in the world and not fear harassment due to my skin colour or sexuality. As I have grown older, I am more aware of these things and more determined to ensure that those who are different to me can enjoy those same 'privileges' (for want of a better word).

Similarly, as we work with students in the coming months, I am also aware that my tolerance comes from parents who are equally tolerant. I never witnessed racist, homophobic or misogynistic behaviour at home, and so I grew up able to accept people for what they are. That is another reason that I am fortunate. Our young people, and their generation in general, are the most tolerant generation I have ever known. But, sadly, some young people grow up in communities and households where intolerant behaviour and language are commonplace. All behaviour is learned behaviour and, in order to break the cycle of discrimination, we not only have to educate our young people but also give them an opportunity to change any intolerant behaviour that they have learned outside of school.

Very often, discriminatory language is passed off as 'banter'. But it is not banter. It hurts and it causes real harm. At Hessle Academy it is not tolerated, and we will be working hard to give people (staff and students) the skills and confidence to call it out and to deal with it.

This week was our Year 9 Parents' Information Evening. Over 250 people attended across three sessions to hear about our options programme, careers support and the importance of high attendance. Thank you to those parents that attended and, if you were unable to attend, you can find the PowerPoint slides [here](#).

The coming weeks will see Parent Consultation Evenings for both Year 7 and Year 9 students. Both of these will be held online, and we will be in touch shortly with information on how you can make appointments. Please try to attend. It is important that we continue to work together to support our young people. If you are unable to attend or not able to log online, please also contact the school to discuss how we can provide you with the feedback you need.

Finally, it has been a fine week in school. The weather has been unseasonably pleasant which makes it a real pleasure to be out and about on duty. The students have been on top form and behaviour and attitudes are very positive across all year groups. Thank you for everything you do to contribute to this - it is really appreciated.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 10 - Friday 19 November 2021

This week I have spent a great deal of time in the company of other school leaders. On Wednesday, I was in Birmingham at the School and Academies Show where over one thousand school leaders met and listened to national leaders reflect on the state of education in England at the moment. Yesterday, I was on Bransholme, at Winifred Holtby School, meeting with my fellow headteachers who lead the schools in our Academy Trust. I

am very fortunate to work alongside such committed and dedicated colleagues as we strive to improve learning not just in our own schools but across the area that we can influence.

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One thing that struck me was the desire of everyone to collaborate. Covid has shown us that, in the absence of effective school leadership from the politicians, it is the school leaders on the ground who invariably made the best decisions around what was best for their children and communities. This level of collaboration is continuing as we slowly emerge from the worst of the pandemic, and it is great to see. You may ask 'why is not always thus'? And so I feel that I must explain.

The national accountability framework for schools is designed to demonstrate which schools make the best progress for their students. That is fine in principle but the means for doing so (Progress 8) is fundamentally flawed in the sense that it pits schools against each other. It shows which schools are above average and which aren't and, of course, not everyone can be above average! It is a zero-sum game - for one school to increase its Progress 8 score, another school must see theirs dip. In other words, we are incentivised to compete against one another. And in a setting such as education, this is madness. We should all be encouraged to share our best practice, not hoard it. We should be promoting collaboration, not competition. It is unthinkable that a similar system would be introduced into the health service for instance and yet in schools, it is considered the optimum way to drive improvement.

Fortunately, most headteachers see the benefits of working together, even more so since Covid, and collaboration marches on.

However, there is one other very damaging consequence of this drive to compete and that comes around 'comparable outcomes'. In order to avoid the accusations of 'grade inflation', the examination boards are only permitted to award a certain number of grades each year. For example, only around 20% of students are able to achieve a Grade 7 in English each year and the same rule applies to every other grade and every other subject. This means that, in any given year, around one-third of all GCSE-aged students will not be able to achieve the threshold of Grade 4s in English and Maths and this ratio is predetermined before they have even sat down to do an examination. It won't matter how well they perform, if they finish outside of the top 60-70%, they will not be able to achieve a Grade 4. In no other walk of life, to my knowledge, do we impose such a cap on potential. Imagine sitting your driving test only to be told that, at the end of the test, you hadn't passed because the quota of passes had already been allocated for that year!

When I explain this to people, the usual response is shock that such a system could be permitted to operate but the reality is that the exam system is mainly there to provide a conveyor belt for colleges and universities and, to a lesser extent, employers and apprenticeships. The grading system allows these organisations to rank young people and determine who is better qualified from a pool of people. It does very little to actually tell us what a student can actually do.

This is why our Academy Vision focuses on the whole student and aims to produce young people 'with exceptional character' and with 'cultural and global awareness' but, as it stands, there is no formal way of this being recognised in a way that universities or employers would accept.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to this and it is being put forward energetically by the Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL), a professional organisation that represents school leaders. Their [blueprint for education](#) would lead to a radical overhaul of the exams system resulting in something which would enable all young people to leave school with a clear statement of what they can do, and have done, during their school life, recognising voluntary work, community service, sporting and artistic endeavour. They are pushing it hard with Government ministers and I personally hope that we may see some change before too long. It is long overdue.

It is at this time of the year that our school and students are especially involved within the local community. Last weekend, I was delighted that a group of our students were present to mark the Remembrance Sunday service in Hessle and, next week, we will also have some of our young people performing at the Hessle Christmas Light Switch On. It is this kind of community support that is currently unrecognised in our exams system and one further reason why some form of change is necessary.

Sadly, in a school with over 1300 young people, we do hear of some of our students behaving poorly in the local community. This is rare, but please be reassured that we speak regularly to all of our students about the importance of positive community behaviour, about respecting others and the importance of taking pride in your school and its uniform. We always investigate and tackle any incidents that are reported to us, so please do not hesitate to let us know if you have concerns about the behaviour of our students especially when travelling to and from school.

I firmly believe in the adage that "It takes a village to raise a child" and so we all must work together to build the behaviours that we want in our community.

I always try to get to the Christmas Light Switch On and take my own children around the square to soak up the atmosphere. I hope to see you there.

Finally, and on the subject of the local community, we have been asked to promote a public consultation that is being carried out by the Hessle Town Council. We know in school that feedback from parents is invaluable, so please support your local council and its efforts to improve the town by completing the survey which can be found [here](#). As an extra incentive, one lucky participant will win £50 of meal vouchers to use in a Hessle restaurant or cafe and this is open to all ages.

Take care and have a lovely weekend.

Mr V Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 11- Friday 26 November 2021

My main thoughts at the end of a tumultuous week are of sadness and relief.

On Monday evening, the devastating accident on the A63 caused many of our staff and parents a lot of inconvenience but it was only in the early hours that we learned that one of those who died in the incident was known to our school community. Alison Clark was not only a close friend of some of our staff but she had also served as a Parent Governor at our Primary School, Penhurst, some years ago. The tragic loss of a wife and mum in such circumstances is hard to come to terms with and our entire school community sends our sympathies to her family. It is impossible to find words to describe how they must be feeling.

We were probably still a little unsettled on Wednesday when we became aware of the fire at the plastics factory in Hessle. When the fire started, many staff and students were still on site and it was extremely unnerving to hear explosions and billowing flames and smoke spreading across an area in which we know many of our families and staff live. The reason for the relief is that miraculously nobody was injured in the incident and as I drove to school on Thursday morning it was incredible to see the skies cleared as I looked from Heads Lane down into the town. The emergency services did an incredible job and reminded us all of how important they are to us.

The priority on Thursday was ensuring that all of our students were okay. There were a small number that had been evacuated from their homes but, in the main, most had suffered no more than a few delays in getting home. Within an hour or so of the school day starting, everything was back to normal and they just wanted to crack on with their learning. I do believe that our young people are capable of coping with anything that is thrown at them. They have such remarkable resilience. One of them even said to me ironically, "Sir, do you remember when we only had the pandemic to contend with?" What amazing kids we have.

This week has also been the second week of 'mock' exams for our Year 11 students. This is the first time that this cohort of students have sat down formally in the sports hall to sit exam papers since they were in Year 9 and, as well as helping us to identify what they do and do not know, it has also been invaluable practice for them to manage their time, deal with the pressure and show what they can do. Their teachers have already begun their marking and the coming weeks will see lots of detailed feedback and development of strategies to help our students improve.

As we approach the Christmas holidays, I know that some families will find this an extremely difficult financial time. Following the controversy of the Marcus Rashford/Free Schools Meal situation last year, the Government has provided additional financial support to families through the Household Support Grant. Families eligible for free school meals may be able to apply for additional support with the costs of fuel, and warm winter clothing for their children. More information can be found [here](#).

Finally, this evening is the great Hessle Christmas Lights Switch On. Many of our students will be there, either performing, volunteering or just to enjoy the atmosphere and spend time with family and friends. If you are heading down that way, I hope you enjoy yourself and find that magical first sprinkling of Christmas spirit. This morning I faced my first tricky dilemma of the Christmas when our Caretaker approached me, "Where do you want the Christmas Tree this year, Vince? Main Hall or Atrium?" Such are the huge strategic decisions that come with school leadership!!

Have a lovely weekend.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 12 - Friday 3 December 2021

This week came the announcement that Sarah Young, TCAT's Director of Education and former Headteacher at Hessle Academy, was resigning to relocate to pastures new. Since leaving Hessle Academy, Sarah has played a pivotal role in establishing TCAT as one of the region's most established and growing Academy Trust chains and, latterly, has provided the Headteachers of our schools with incredible support throughout the pandemic. In many ways, the pandemic has stymied a lot of the academic improvement that she had begun but our schools could not have done without her support through very difficult times.

As Headteacher of our school, her work was remarkable. When I joined the school in 2010, it was unrecognisable from the confident and successful school that we have today. Her drive, energy and passion dragged the school, and the staff, through some very dark days at times and it was a real privilege to work so closely with her and the other members of the leadership team as the school grew and improved. Sarah is relocating to the York area in the new year and will stay working in the education sector. I am sure that everyone in the Hessle community wishes her well.

The leadership team to which I refer above has entirely moved on now. Three of the original team from 2010 are headteachers now and others have retired. This thought came to mind when I met with our new Chief Executive, Lizann Lowson, yesterday and I briefed her on the emerging leadership talent that we have within our staff at the moment. I know that there are future headteachers working in our classrooms today and, hopefully, this conveyor belt of talent will ensure strong and steady leadership of our school for many years to come.

I owe my appointment as Headteacher to the mentoring and support that I received from Sarah Young and it will be my duty, and privilege, to ensure that other colleagues can benefit in a similar way.

Over Christmas, the East Riding Local Authority is providing financial support in the form of vouchers for families where children are eligible for Free School Meals. This will be processed by the school automatically.

Finally, we shall be sending LFD test kits home with students next week as we are encouraging students to continue with the twice weekly throughout the Christmas break. When students return to school in January (Wednesday 5 January) we will be offering them an on-site LFD test. These will be carried out whilst the students are in school. We will shortly be sending out more information and a form for you to complete if you wish your child to be tested. If you are able to test your child at home before they return to school then it will not be necessary for them to have the LFD test in school.

Suddenly, it is nearly Christmas. I always find that time gets away from me at this time of year. One moment I am complaining that the Christmas adverts are on TV way too early; the

next minute it is December and I haven't prepared a thing. Thankfully, tomorrow is when Christmas begins in the Groak household. The tree is going up, there are a couple of Christmas films lined up on Netflix and there will be no schoolwork or any visitors. I can't wait.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

WEEK 13 - Friday 10 December 2021

Last month, I wrote to you about our commitment to tackle discriminatory language in and outside of our school. "It's Not Banter" is the tagline we have used for this and the first signs that this is beginning to 'land' are appearing as we start to hear students using that term to challenge one another. It is refreshing that we are able to have these open and honest conversations with students about the language that is sometimes used between students, especially between students who are different from one another.

At the start of my teaching career, working in Lincolnshire but still living in Hull, issues of diversity and inclusion were undeveloped, to say the least. One ex-colleague, I recall, once told me that "we don't have any issues with diversity or discrimination because we're all just white british in this part of the world." I would certainly argue, and thankfully most people would now agree with me, that living and working in a region that is predominantly White British in terms of ethnicity creates even more reason for us to understand the differences that exist between us.

At Hessle High School, the proportion of our students that are not White British is now above 10% and this has tripled in the past five to six years. We are an increasingly diverse community not only in terms of race, but also in terms of disability, sexuality, language and religion and it is our responsibility to educate all of our students about this diversity and also to celebrate it.

It has been really pleasing to attend our TCAT Conference today where the theme was Diversity and Inclusion and where we heard from a number of teachers that work in more diverse communities than ours. They spoke about how they have helped to create truly inclusive schools where differences are genuinely celebrated. At Hessle High, we really believe that young people are much better equipped for a successful life if they are confident in dealing with people of all types, regardless of their race, gender, sexuality or economic background. True social mobility can only occur when young people have the skills to communicate with as broad a range of people as possible. Our programme at Hessle and the experiences we have heard from colleagues in our conference will only help us to support students in that journey.

With just one week to go until the end of term, thoughts of Christmas are on everyone's minds and we are all hopeful that we will be able to have more of a celebratory Christmas together this year. We know as well that the Christmas period can be an especially anxious time for families and children. Chat Health is a local charity that can provide support for families who need someone to speak to during the Christmas Holidays. If you feel that this is something that may help you, more information can be found [here](#).

Further support is also available to promote active lifestyles. In partnership with East Riding of Yorkshire Council, YogaBugs offer all families on free school meals access to their online

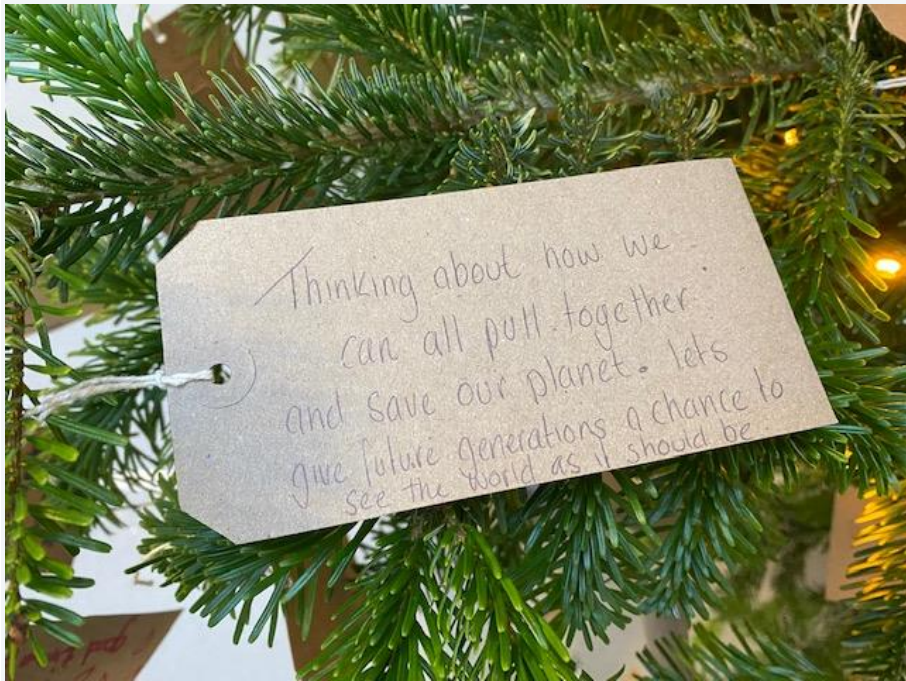
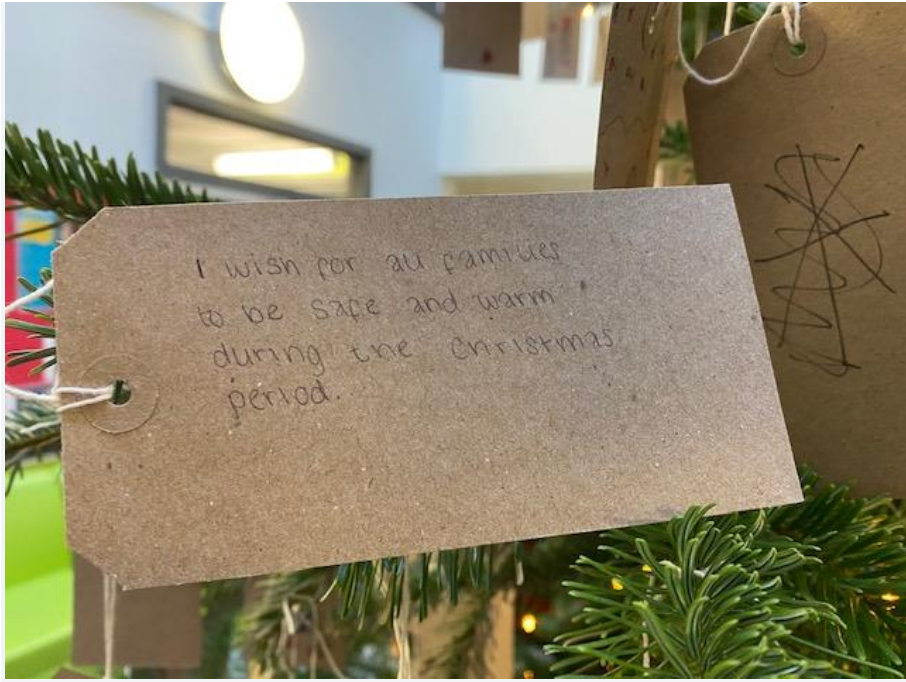
yoga and mindfulness platform. This is completely FREE from now to the end of January and can be found [here](#).

Next week will be a busy one in school. The students will continue learning until the final day but we also mark the upcoming festivities by taking time to enjoy our Tree of Kindness - this is our school Christmas Tree which has pride of our place in our atrium and is now decorated with hundreds of gift tags - each one of which bearing a message that one of our students has written. These are their Christmas wishes which may be dedicated to a family member, or for their wider community. They are beautiful to see and to read and we are very proud of it.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, stay safe and take care.

Mr Groak

Headteacher





WEEK 14 - Friday 17 December 2021

I write this just before going out onto the field to watch the annual Staff versus Students football match and there is a palpable tension in the air. This fixture is a real rite of passage for our Year 11 students who look forward to it all year and the opportunity to test their skills and mettle against the staff. It is not much less competitive on the staff side and team manager, Dave 'Mike Bassett' Willson has selected a fine blend of youth, talent and experience with which to challenge the youngsters.

Nobody can remember a time when the students actually beat the staff in this fixture, although there was a draw a couple of years ago which the students celebrated fiercely. A quick glance down the staff team suggests that they are favourites to maintain their proud record although the Year 11 students did beat a Year 13 team last week in a warm-up game.

Whatever the result, it will all be played in a good spirit (I sincerely hope so, anyway!) and I am sure that the spectators will enjoy the game too (if the fog lifts!).

The Year 11 lads were determined that their game should also help to raise awareness of, and money for, two very worthwhile charities and the boys themselves have chosen to support Macmillan Cancer as well as the fund set up to support workers from Bridgewood Plastics, which was hit by the fire last month. These efforts demonstrate the great sense of responsibility that our students show for their community.

After the game, we will say farewell to a couple of our staff who are moving onto pastures new and then everyone will go their separate ways to begin their Christmas break. The Autumn term is not only the longest in school but it is by far the busiest, crammed as it is with Open Evenings and Parents Evenings. There is little that can be done to spread these events out as they need to be held at the start of the school year. But it takes its toll on staff and, in the past few weeks, energy levels have dropped significantly. Nevertheless, everyone has mustered one last effort to help the students celebrate the end of term and there is a lovely atmosphere around the place. I can hear 'Last Christmas' playing in a classroom nearby as the tutor's enjoy their end of term party with their tutees. There will be plenty of hard work ahead for all of our students in January and beyond but, for now, it is great to see them enjoying themselves.

Like you, I follow the news with increasing anxiety about what may happen next in the ongoing struggle with Covid. Despite what is rumoured, we have not been given any further guidance from the DfE with regards to what may happen in January as far as schools are concerned. Rest assured that, after a good break, I will be in touch with you before the new year, if there are any significant changes to announce. Otherwise, we expect to see all students back as planned on Wednesday 5 January.

The Groak family will be spending Christmas in Surrey with my wife's parents. It is great for our children to experience another part of the country especially over Christmas. They will be spoiled rotten, I'm sure, but that will also give my wife and I the chance to nip over to Bristol for a few days too. It is a city I have never been to but, Covid permitting, we are looking forward to enjoying its restaurants and waterfront bars for a few days. And then it will be back home for a few more days rest before we start to prepare for whatever 2022 has in store for us.

Whatever you are doing over the Christmas holiday, I hope that you find time to enjoy it with friends, family and loved ones and that you are able to stay safe.

At the end of another challenging year, more than ever I am extremely grateful for your ongoing support both personally and to my staff.

From everyone at Hessle High School, a very Merry Christmas.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 15 - Friday 7 January 2022

I have long been a fan of Bruce Springsteen. I love his recorded music but mostly I am a fan of his live performances and am fortunate to have seen him in concert, with the E-Street Band, many times over the past thirty-plus years. There are many reasons why I enjoy Bruce in concert but the main reason is the sheer consistency of what he does. 'Consistency' is a word that I use a lot and I chuckle to myself that I refer to it in the context of a live music concert but bear with me...

I have seen Bruce in a number of different venues and at different stages of his career. In recent years, you might hear people say 'he's not as good as he used to be'. Well, it would be staggering if he was. This is a man who is renowned for playing four-hour concerts; it would be nearly impossible to do that at his age (he is now 72, and I last saw him in 2016, when he still played for over three hours on a hot summer's day in Glasgow). On that day, he gave everything. He left nothing on stage and walked off drenched in sweat, the crowd baying for more. He may not be at his peak but, in my opinion, there is still no one on the scene that can get anywhere near him as a live performer. Bruce never phones it in.

I first really appreciated this level of dedication and consistency in Coventry of all places. Earlier on the same tour, Bruce had played a high-profile festival at Hyde Park which had culminated in him bringing Paul McCartney on stage to play the encore. The crowd went wild - I was there, and it was a real Bruce highlight. I swear that he would have played all night if the event organisers hadn't switched the power off for fear of a hefty fine from the local council.

On the back of the euphoria of that gig, myself and my mate (who shares my Bruce obsession) decided we would snap up any tickets we could for the remaining dates of the UK tour. No matter where or when they were. And so, a few weeks later, we set off to Coventry on a wet Tuesday night. We knew we wouldn't be home before two or three in the morning but we had committed ourselves to the cause. I went with modest expectations - nothing could be as good as Hyde Park. But, at the end of the night and another three hour show, Bruce fairly stumbled off stage, exhausted. And everyone in the crowd agreed that it was yet another incredible show. As we drove home, we discussed how he could summon up the energy and drive to perform to the same standard on a wet Tuesday in Coventry as he could when he was on stage with McCartney. Later, I read Bruce's autobiography and he explained it; "When I play a show, I always tell myself that, for some guys in the audience, it may be the first, and only, time they see the E-Street Band in concert. And so I want every single show to be as good as my best, no matter whether it is in Madison Square Garden or Shitsville, Illinois. I want it to be great."

I am inspired by much of Springsteen's work but it was that sentiment, more than any other, that inspires me the most. For me, consistency is at the heart of what I try to do and what I want for our school and our students. Every day matters and every lesson matters and we need to bring our A-game to every encounter that we have with our young people. They deserve it and, after the last two years they have had, they need it.

Nowadays, I don't teach very much. This year, I teach a group of Year 13 students on a Wednesday afternoon. I am happy to admit that I am not the best teacher in our school. I went into leadership too soon in my career to have really fully developed my craft; I am consistently good (I think), but not as great as some of my colleagues. Nowadays, I rely on two key elements - I have kept my subject knowledge fully up to date and can bring plenty of real life examples of the business and economic world into my lessons. And, secondly, I bring as much energy, drive and commitment to my lessons as I can possibly muster. I spend most of the two hours on my feet, at the front of the classroom, explaining, describing, questioning, challenging and debating. By 3pm, I'm exhausted. It may not quite

be a Springsteen concert but it is my very best, every week, inspired by Bruce. And, I'm proud to say, I never cancel on them. Whoever wishes to meet with me can wait; my class comes first.

It is unrealistic of me to expect the same energy levels from every one of my staff; the majority of them teach for four or five hours per day and even Bruce can't perform for that long every night. But we strive for consistency. Someone once said that the best thing about working in a school is that it really matters. And the hardest thing is that it matters every single day. That is so true and it is why my staff not only love their work but why they are also exhausted at the end of each half term.

As we reach the end of the first week of the new term, I am pleased to report that the return of students has gone very smoothly. Attendance has been high, we have taken account of the reported positive cases and those students are isolating themselves for the required time period. I want to thank those students, and their parents, for doing this. By testing and isolating, they have reduced the risk of other students, and their families, catching the virus. It is a really selfless act and one for which we should all be thankful. Please continue to use LFD tests to regularly check your child at home so that you too can play your part in keeping other students, staff and the community safe. If you wish your child to be given home test kits, please follow the link [here](#).

Yesterday, I attended a briefing from the local authority's public health team in which they summarised the cases in our area and also their expectations that the number will continue to rise as cases spread around the country. We are aware that the position we are currently in may change quite suddenly if we are faced with large numbers of staff absences.

In the event that this happens, we have a number of strategies. Firstly, lessons of absent colleagues will be covered by one of our cover supervisor staff or another of our existing staff, often Heads of Department or Senior Leaders who are not already teaching at that time. If that is insufficient to cover the absence, we will look to bring in external supply staff; however this may prove difficult as supply staff are in short supply due to the sheer demand from all schools for supply staff. Therefore it may be the case, in the coming weeks, that your child may be taught by someone who is not their normal teacher and that this may happen much more than is normal. We understand that this is not an ideal situation but hope you appreciate that we will be doing our best to ensure that learning continues as effectively as it possibly can.

Our final contingency plan may be to resort to some element of home learning with one year group working from home for a week on a rota basis. I can reassure you that we are a long way off needing to do this at the moment but that this situation could change very quickly. Of course, we will provide you with as much notice as possible.

I hope that you have enjoyed a positive start to 2022.

Have a lovely weekend and stay safe.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 16 - Friday 14 January 2022

"Your flag flyin' over the courthouse

Means certain things are set in stone.

Who we are, what we'll do and what we won't"

Bruce Springsteen, Long Walk Home

It seems I am not alone in my admiration for Bruce Springsteen. Last week's blog prompted a few parents to contact me to let me know that they were fans too! Some passed the message on via their children which typically went something like this;

Student: *"My mum told me to tell you that she loves Bruce Springsteen too."*

Me: *"Oh really, that's great to hear. Tell her I'm pleased about that."*

Student: *"I will. I don't know what all the fuss is about though, I think he's rubbish."*

Sadly, my own children feel the same way and it is going to take a lot more Bruce education before they see the light!

Anyway, one of my favourite Springsteen lyrics is the one at the top of this blog. It comes from a song he wrote in the early 2000s when the USA was in the throes of political turmoil under President Bush. Springsteen sings about his country moving in a direction that he disagrees with and observes that returning to traditional American values will be a 'Long Walk Home'. I love the line about values - *"who we are, what we'll do **and what we won't**".*

On 20 May 2020, everyone at Hessle High School was preparing to welcome back more of our students to school following the first lockdown. It was also, coincidentally, national 'Thank a Teacher Day'. Maybe that's why those in Number 10 decided to throw a party on the same day?

Or maybe not.

Anyway, on 20 May, I wrote to parents to let you know our plans to welcome the children of key workers as well as some in other year groups. This is what I wrote;

"We are doing our best to welcome children back as soon after half term as possible. But, let me give you an indication of the type of logistics involved in doing so. Across both schools, we are preparing for eight different cohorts of learners to return; Nursery, Reception, Year 1, Year 6, Year 10, Year 12 and the key worker children at primary and secondary phase. That is approximately 550 children, pupils and students. Each cohort requires its own plan in terms of safety, logistics, behaviour, staffing and curriculum. Every cohort will be split into 'bubbles', no greater in number than 15 and each of those require a plan for ensuring safe arrival and departure from the school site so that parents, carers and local residents can also stay safe. Some cohorts will require public transport and we need to consider catering. We are supported by an extremely dedicated body of staff but some of them fall into the category of clinically vulnerable or live with people who are; we need to consider their needs. We are doing that gladly, because we want to welcome back our learners. But it takes time and we have to get it right because you are entrusting your children into our care."

As I read my words back, I can remember the frustration I felt about the lack of clear guidance coming from the Government but also the sense of pride in my team for the incredible work we were doing under unprecedented conditions whilst some in the media spoke about 'teachers being off work!'. Nothing could have been further from the truth. And, after finishing their work, my staff went home (or stayed at home!), some of them alone. They followed the Government's guidance. They did what was right.

When the pandemic is finally over, I know that everyone at Hessle will be able to look back on what we did and be proud. Because our values are set in stone, we know who we are, what we will do, and what we won't.

Have a lovely weekend and stay safe.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 17 - Friday 21 January 2022

It has been another exceptionally busy five days at Hessle High School. The past two weeks have seen the highest number of positive Covid cases reported to us since the start of the Academic Year and this has also included a sizeable number of staff. This week, at one time or another, around a fifth of our staff have been absent due to having Covid themselves or because one of their own young children has the virus. This has placed a strain on those staff in school in terms of covering lessons, duties and following up the normal day-to-day issues that arise every day in a large school. It is likely, at the moment, that your child may not be taught by their normal teacher in every lesson and, in some cases, we are also relying on external supply staff to cover lessons. This is far from ideal but we have no choice in order to keep the school open for all students.

Despite this, the students have risen to the challenge and behaviour and attitudes remain very positive. I am delighted that the staff team are also 'mucking in' and doing their very best to support one another. Nevertheless, it is not possible for us to function at our very best under these circumstances and I apologise if you have experienced any problems with communication etc. and hope you will bear with us. If you have concerns of a serious nature, please continue to contact us and these will of course be prioritised by our staff.

Having outlined the context we are working in (and we are not alone amongst schools in the area) it was frustrating to hear the Government's sudden announcement regarding the relaxation of Covid measures in schools, especially when it was made at such short notice. This announcement takes no account of local issues and, as I outlined earlier in the week, we have decided not to follow this guidance for now. Decisions like this show no recognition of how schools are run and how we communicate and explain changes to parents and students. When we have asked students to wear face coverings, we have explained the reasons for doing so i.e. doing your bit to keep yourself and others safe. So how on earth could we now say to students that they're not necessary when they know full well that many of their peers and staff are absent with Covid? It would totally undermine the relationship of trust that we have with students and parents. So we are not making the change and will take a close look at the number of cases we have in school next week before making a decision. It has been clear from the messages and feedback we have received from parents and students that we have your overwhelming support in this, so 'thank you'.

I have also written to parents this week to remind you that, next Friday, it is our highly anticipated Mock Interview Day for Year 11 students. This is a huge event in our calendar and one that is of great value to students. For those that are not familiar with it, over forty different employers join the staff in the school (some in person, some remotely) to interview our students for hypothetical jobs within their organisation. The students are coached, interviewed and given detailed feedback and, at the end of the process, one student is chosen to be appointed to each 'job'. Not only does it help students with interview practice but it is a time for reflection and for celebrating what they have all achieved in life and the students really shine. As they arrive at the start of the day, it is like the opening credits for 'The Apprentice' with students dressed smartly in business attire. As nervous as they are at the beginning, they visibly grow as the day goes on. It really is terrific.

And then, in the afternoon, the students go into different departments to work with staff in small groups on areas for improvement.

In order to make this work, the rest of the school will be working from home. Students in Years 7 to 10 will be provided with work on Google Classroom and your support in providing your child with an appropriate place to work and a structure for the day would be greatly appreciated.

Returning to the Covid situation, our experience has been that the number of positive cases that are affecting our staff, students and community tend to come in waves lasting between 7 and 10 days. For that reason, I remain hopeful that we will soon be through the worst of this current situation and thank you again for your support.

Take care and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 18 - Friday 28 January 2022

As I write this, our Year 11 students are currently being interviewed by over 40 employers who have volunteered their time today to support us with Mock Interview Day. We have assembled an eclectic mix of professionals from all walks of life school with members of the armed forces, nurses, construction workers - you name it, we have them in school today. As I got out of my car this morning and walked across the car park alongside our visitors, it was a little like watching a Village People reunion (you might have to be a certain age to get that musical reference)!

And then, shortly afterwards, our Year 11 students arrived and what a fantastic sight they are today. All dressed in their best professional outfits - it was like the opening credits of The Apprentice! The students have been very nervous but, as they have settled in and put their own individual interview behind them, they are really enjoying the day and relaxing enough to chat with many of the visitors in school.

Year 11 is a huge year in the life of any young person; during this time they have to complete their GCSE courses, make some serious decisions about their future pathways, apply and be interviewed for their chosen college or apprenticeship, revise for exams and then sit them. And all of this on top of dealing with the pressures of adolescence, growing up and that

journey of discovery into what type of a person you are, and hope to be. I have huge empathy for them. At my age of 53, one year is much like the next really. And, on those occasions when I am faced with a decision of significance for myself, my family or the people I lead in school, I have the advantage of many years of experience and (hopefully some) wisdom, to fall back on. Our students don't have that which is why they need a good team behind, and around, them.

Today, we remind them of the team that they have in school. Without the rest of the students on site, we can give them our undivided attention, along with our visitors, to reassure them that we are on their team. Most important, of course, are the family; and never are parents needed more than when the children reach this stage in their education, and life. Ensuring that our young people get the balance right in the coming months is vital. We want our students to be focused on their work but we also want them to look after their wellbeing and we all know that too much work can be counter productive. So, those of you who are fortunate (maybe not the right word?) to have a child who is in Year 11, I want to say 'thank you' for helping them and also that we are here to help you too. Mr Julian, Mrs Lacey and Assistant Headteacher, Mrs Meir, are spending many hours with students to help them get the balance right so please pick up the phone if you think we can help your child further. After today, there are 59 school days until the first exam - we need to make sure every one of them counts.

And to parents of children who have been working from home today, I hope that the above will demonstrate the power of today's activities in school and that you can look forward to your child enjoying the same event in the years to come. We recognise that asking other students, and parents, to work from home is a difficult choice to make but we firmly believe it is such a crucial part of the Year 11 experience to justify it.

Finally, thank you for your support with the ongoing covid measures that we have kept in place and with the request for students to test daily. We hope that these measures will only be required for a little while longer but we are delighted with the response from students in observing these.

Have a lovely weekend and stay safe.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 19 - Friday 4 February 2022

I have spent a disproportionate amount of time this week talking about food.

After two weeks of non-stop Covid discussions, the fall in the number of cases that we have seen this week has not only been a great relief but has also given us a chance to look ahead at one of our other priorities; namely school food.

Since the start of the pandemic almost two years ago (two years!!!), there have been countless changes to the catering offered by our team. But, before going further, I should explain how our school catering works.

As educationalists, our expertise lies in the care of children both pastoral and academic and so we have little experience or knowledge of mass catering. Therefore, like the vast majority of schools, we outsource our catering to specialist catering firms, of which there are many in the UK that specialise in school meals. This arrangement enables us to focus on what we do best and allow the experts to ensure that hundreds of children are offered a range of food every day that complies with Government standards on nutrition, that is affordable and can also be served quickly enough to feed over a thousand hungry young people in forty-five minutes (twenty minutes at break!). This is a challenge in itself but this has been compounded by Covid that has forced them to contend with year group bubbles, social distancing, restrictions on the use of crockery and cutlery and, on top of this, significant staffing shortages which are a problem right across the hospitality sector. Despite these challenges and, whilst they may not have always been able to offer the full range of choice, the team have never missed a service in that period of time. But we know they can, and want to, do better and, this week, we have been looking into ways in which we can improve the lunch and break experience for students.

Firstly, after half term, we will be reopening the outdoor snack shack which provides a grab'n'go option which reduces queueing time and allows students to spend more time outdoors, exercising and socialising. The snack shack will also shortly open before school, for a trial period, when a breakfast menu will be available for students before they come into the school building.

Secondly, we will revert after half term to the normal lunch duration, of 45 minutes (50 minutes for Cohort B). This was changed, you will remember, in October for the comfort of students during the cold weather. Hopefully, it won't be long after half term that the field will reopen and students can again enjoy the full school site at break and lunchtime.

Our contract caterers, ABM, will also be introducing a new till system which will further speed up service. This will require a new biometric image to be taken for all students and we will require your consent to do this which you can provide for us [here](#). The new system will also provide students with an automatic daily allowance of £6 per day. ABM have not increased any prices, this change comes after many requests from parents to increase individual limits, but if you would like to decrease (or increase) this daily limit for your child, please contact us on hhsoffice@hessleacademy.com clearly stating your child's name, tutor group and preferred daily limit. Parents can also stipulate that your child only utilises their daily allowance at lunchtime if you feel that helps to ensure they eat at the right times of the day. It is worth noting that students on Free School Meals may choose to spend their allowance at any time unless you make a specific request for it to be lunchtime only.

We continue to ensure that all students are able to access lunch and, if a child does not have enough money on their account, they may obtain a temporary overdraft by going to the School Reception. Please be aware that, once an account goes overdrawn, it will need to be topped up before it can be used again. To help with this, it is possible to set up low balance alerts on ParentPay.

Finally, I mentioned at the start of this blog that we have seen a drop in the number of positive cases reported to us and this has indeed been a significant decrease. Nevertheless, we will continue to require students and staff to wear face coverings until further notice whilst we continue to assess the impact of these measures. We also ask that you provide your child with daily tests to identify asymptomatic cases and to exercise caution in terms of groups of students mixing in homes and out of school.

I always feel like I have hibernated during January and it is only in early February that the Groak family begin to use weekends for anything other than rest and recuperation. This weekend, my wife and son will be heading over the Pennines to watch Manchester City v Fulham, whilst I will spend the day with our seven year old daughter. She has it all planned out - after her drama class, we will be watching Sing 2 at the cinema followed by Ice Skating (I think I'll watch!) then tea at Papas, followed by our fifteenth viewing of Encanto! I had better make sure I get my marking done tonight so I can enjoy it fully!

Whatever you are doing this weekend, stay safe and enjoy it.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 20 - Friday 11 February 2022

Over the past two years, when exams have not taken place, teachers and Heads of Department at Hessle High School and Sixth Form College worked diligently and honestly to provide every student with a Teacher Assessed Grade (TAG) instead. This work was done with integrity and we resisted any attempt to 'game' the system by inflating the number of students that achieved higher grades or that they did not deserve. We also ensured that a full range of evidence was used so that students who had missed lots of time or suffered genuine hardship during Covid lockdowns still had the opportunity to show what they could do. Consequently, we never had a single appeal from a student or parent and all of our grades were approved by each exam board both at GCSE and A Level. That was remarkable, and a testament to the honest work our staff did, with the support of students and parents.

So it was bitterly disappointing to hear this week that some private schools across England had seen TAGs as an opportunity to vastly over-award students. The rise in the proportion of top grades awarded in private schools was significantly higher than in the state sector. In one school, the % of A* Grades awarded went from 6.5% to 54% and, in another, 90% of grades were A*s, compared to 33% in 2019. Across the private school sector, the proportion of A* grades rose from 16% in 2019 (the last year exams were held) to 40% in 2021.

The topic of 'grade inflation' is not new and, every summer, some of the press use results day as an opportunity to denigrate student achievement and to bash teachers by questioning why results have reached another record high. But what has happened in some of these private schools is not 'grade inflation', it is much less ethical than that and the real victims are the students whose schools did not engage in this kind of practice, but who achieved grades that were fair and just. They will have found themselves competing with private school students for places at university and, ultimately, for employment.

The response of the Education Secretary, Nadim Zahawi, was also disappointing; *"They (the schools) reassured me that the children who were expected to get high grades, A-grades, actually achieved those."* Maybe if you are prepared to accept that a party is a work event, then you would believe that line of argument but most people can see it for what it is; yet more recycling of privilege and getting away with it. Remember also that private schools, which already enjoy significant advantages through their selection process and charitable status, continue to resist (in many cases) demands to work with the state sector by involving themselves with the Academisation process.

Despite that, I know where I would rather work. Leading a state school, with all of its challenges, is the most rewarding time of my life and working with colleagues that display honesty and integrity every single day, is a privilege - of the right kind.

We believe that the young people of today need a strong moral code - where hard work is rewarded. Our 2020 and 2021 students deserved the grades that they got and they can feel rightly proud of them. This teaches them an important lesson about sacrifice, hard work and reward and they will be better equipped in the long run to succeed than their peers in the private sector, who essentially have been let down by their schools in too many cases.

One of the ways in which we aim to strengthen the moral code of our students is through working in the community and this is an area I am keen to work more closely with. We already have a very strong relationship with Hessle All Saints Church and recently the Reverend Gemma Turner paid us a visit, along with Lucy, who is a trainee vicar (who even knew there was such a thing?). Both ladies are refreshingly engaging about their work and how they want to connect and support the young people of our area. We already use the church for our Christmas concert and we are looking at ways to extend that relationship further. In the meantime, our students have other opportunities to spend time in the fantastic church buildings by attending some of their youth group sessions. These are Christian groups which also offer lots of chances for youngsters to meet new people and to learn new hobbies and interests. More information can be found here - [flyer 1](#) [flyer 2 - meeting topics](#)

As I stated in my letter earlier in the week, we will be relaxing the expectation that students wear face coverings in classrooms from Monday. We ask that students still bring a mask however to wear in communal areas. Hopefully, after half term, we will be able to consign face coverings to the dustbin of history once and for all. We can but hope.

Take care and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 21 - Friday 18 February 2022

This is the time of year during which my attention is firmly fixed on the next academic year. In early March, we will learn of the number of students who will be joining us in Year 7 next year and we can firmly put in place our staffing model. But, even before then, we are starting to recruit for the teaching staff that we already know that we will need. Our numbers on roll have grown consistently year on year which brings some certainty around funding and enables us to enter the recruitment market earlier than most. And, in recent years, this has paid dividends with some very high quality appointments to our teaching, and wider, staff team. Thankfully, this has continued during the past few weeks as we put together the team for 2022-23 and beyond. Just last week, we recruited a very experienced Chemistry teacher from a school on the South Bank who is looking to relocate closer to his home in Hessle and the very next day, we appointed a Biology teacher who will be an Early Career Teacher (ECT) i.e. just starting out into teaching. This future colleague has lots of experience in Marine

Biology and will bring plenty of industry experience to our school. And then, on Monday, we secured the services of another ECT, this time in History. This particular lady is actually an ex-student of the school who also worked as a cover supervisor with us before going away to do her training. We are delighted that she will be coming back to us as a permanent member of staff.

In the coming weeks, we anticipate that we will be needing another two teachers and we will keep our fingers crossed that we are as successful on those occasions. With 80% of our annual budget tied up in staffing, getting the numbers right is a fine art. It would be fabulous to recruit teachers with years and years of experience but they are significantly more expensive than a colleague at the start of their career, around 60% more costly when you factor in the additional on-costs we pay in National Insurance and Pension Contributions. And so a blend of staff across different stages of their career is not only optimal from a financial point of view but also desirable from a teaching and learning perspective. Experience is needed of course but younger staff also bring new ideas and are often the most innovative with technology. Thankfully, we are continuing to build a mixture of colleagues across all ages.

No matter the age of the member of staff, you cannot buy resilience and I am incredibly fortunate to have the most resilient body of teachers and support staff I could ever hope for. During the past six and a half weeks, they have dealt with the waves of Covid, student and colleague absence and, today, a once in a decade storm, with calm, professionalism and good humour. This morning, as the rain lashed horizontally, they managed to shepherd 1200 young people through the various halls that were opened for the start of day line ups and then get them into their tutor rooms, all prepared for the day ahead. And all within around fifteen minutes. It was a remarkable feat of logistics and carried out with incredible positivity and calm. It is an absolute pleasure to work with them.

As you will probably be aware, the Humber Bridge was closed completely today around lunchtime. Thankfully, we were given slightly advance notice of this and so we were able to communicate with parents of those students who live on the south side of the Humber and ensure that all 51 of them were off site and on their way home before the bridge closed. Thank you to parents who worked together to facilitate that.

Finally, a reminder that, after half term, we will no longer be requiring students to wear face coverings in school and we will gradually return all practises to normal in the coming weeks including full weekly assemblies and, hopefully, a great deal more trips and excursions.

I have spent much of today being asked if I am 'going anywhere nice' for half term. To which my reply has mostly been the same, that my half term consists of getting my suits dry cleaned, renewing my car insurance, power washing my patio and similar mundane but necessary tasks. At least tomorrow I can return to the MKM Stadium for Hull FC's first game of the season - I shall be cheering them on and hoping for another win. Whatever you are doing over the weekend and next week, I hope you all stay safe from the storm and find time to relax as a family.

Best wishes

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 22 - Friday 4 March 2022

Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine during the half term break, our thoughts at the start of this week were focused on our families that originate in Eastern Europe. We do not have any students who hail from Ukraine but we have several from Russia and many more from the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania) as well as Poland, Georgia and Romania. Given the proximity of these countries to one another, there are many links to Ukraine. During the week, we have paid close attention to these students, especially those whose families come from Russia in order to check that they are okay and to offer any support with their emotions. Thankfully, we are not aware of any of our school community that has come to any harm but there is obviously a great deal of concern at how the situation may unfold.

On Tuesday morning, we spoke to all of the students and sought to explain what is going on in Ukraine and the impact it is having on the country and its people. We emphasised three key messages;

Firstly, to follow events but to do so using reputable sources of information. As with most things, there is a lot of disinformation and propaganda around this event which can lead to a very distorted view. We urged students to watch the mainstream media and newspapers for their information and to discuss their thoughts and views with adults who they trust.

Secondly, although this event is taking place on the other side of the continent, it is affecting real people and will also be a concern for the people in our school, who have already mentioned. We spoke to the students about treating one another with respect and with compassion.

Finally, we know that this has upset some students, especially some of our younger students. We have explained to them that it is okay to be worried and that it always helps to talk to people about their feelings and emotions. Their tutor room is a safe place in which they can do that daily.

I am pleased to say that our students this week have dealt with this news very well, have shown great resilience and have made a great start to the new term.

We are also delighted to be able to support a local effort to collect materials for refugees leaving Ukraine. A contact of one of our staff is already on his way to Poland driving a lorry laden with supplies, some of which were donated by staff in our school earlier in the week. Every little helps.

To turn our attention to brighter matters, we have made good progress towards the organising of our Year 11 Prom recently. The date for the prom this year is Friday 1 July. You may have seen in the local news last year that we held our Prom at the school due to the closure of other venues and that we launched our first ever Prom Hire Shop to support our students and to ensure they had access to quality outfits for the big event. We never imagined how popular this would become and we were given donations from all over the local community and ended up with over 100 dresses and many, many suits. This is all stored at the school and we have started promoting the hire shop in school to students.

We have created a hire shop [website](#) (which is available to Y11 students through their Google sign in), we are still uploading outfit images but many are available to view. The cost

to hire outfits is very low (£10 to cover dry cleaning) and means that the Prom experience can be enjoyed by as many students as possible without too much worry about the cost. Once again, thank you to everyone that has supported us with this venture. To enquire about hire or to organise a viewing/fitting contact prom@hessleacademy.com

Finally, one of the great privileges of my job is to be able to hear about and celebrate the very many successes that our students achieve, both in and out of school. In recent weeks, two of our students have been very successful in the worlds of swimming and rugby league.

Last month, Nathan B competed in the World Para Swimming Championship Series in Aberdeen. Nathan had his leg amputated when he was 18 months old and has not only managed to live a very normal and healthy life with a prosthetic limb but he has also managed to compete at the highest level as a swimmer. Nathan's ultimate goal is to represent the GB Para Swim Squad. Nathan is an incredibly modest young man and much of his success was relatively unknown to many people until quite recently. He is a credit to his family and the school and we are very proud of him.

Alfie W is in Year 10 and has long held an ambition to play Rugby League. He has worked and trained very hard for the moment when he might have the opportunity of joining a scholarship scheme. Prior to half term, he was very nervous as the decision was imminent and this week we were delighted that he has been offered a scholarship with Hull Kingston Rovers. He will now be guided and trained by their professional coaches which will be terrific for his chances of progressing in the sport. As a fervent Hull FC fan myself, I have broken the news to him that, sadly, I will now never be able to speak to him again but he took the news well!! All joking apart, we are very proud of Alfie and wish him all the best.

Working with all of our young people is a joy and a great privilege but we know we cannot do it without your support at all times. Thank you once again for the support you give to my team in the work that they do.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 23 - Friday 11 March 2022

It is around two years ago now that we first began to contemplate 'lockdown'. At the time, few of us had much idea of what this would mean and certainly none of us would imagine that we would still be talking about, and dealing with, Covid in Spring 2022. As we step gingerly into a world which looks at least slightly like 2019 or before, we are still dealing with some of the longer-term consequences of Covid and one of these is school attendance.

Yesterday, 92.4% of our students were in school. This has been rising steadily since our low point this year when attendance for a few days in January was as low as 84%. Whilst we are delighted at the upward trend, this is still way below our 'normal' levels of attendance. Pre-pandemic, our typical attendance across a whole year was between 95%-96% - broadly the national average and we were working very hard, with parents, to keep this high and push it higher still.

Since the pandemic began there have been some deep-rooted psychological changes that perhaps explain lower attendance. Clearly, in March 2020, we were all told to go home and stay home. Over several further lockdowns, the idea of being at home and working from home became the norm and there was perhaps some mixed messaging about whether businesses or Government wanted people to work at home or in the workplace. In schools, we have partially contributed to that. On the one hand, myself and my colleagues tell students and parents that school is where they need to be and then, on occasion, we tell students to go home because they have a symptom of something that might be covid or because they have sat near someone who has covid. We know that students are better in school but the clarity of message has not always been there.

Nevertheless, school is where young people need to be, and never more so than right now. I resist the urge to talk about 'missed' learning or the 'lost' generation as this just labels our young people; nevertheless, there is an urgency in schools to give our students the very best chance in life.

Before the pandemic hit, we were rewriting our Key Stage 3 curriculum. In the meetings where we discussed the content, you could feel the excitement in the air. We were introducing new topics, new themes, new connections between subjects that we believed would really engage students in Years 7, 8 and 9 and give them a thirst for lifelong learning. Students in Year 7 English lessons for instance would be studying *Oliver Twist* but, at the same time, also learning about the context of Victorian England in order to better understand what it was like to be a child in the 1800s. In Spanish, they would be learning the usual grammar and vocabulary but also exploring life in Spanish-speaking South America, studying the culture, food and people. History lessons would have a much more local focus, enabling students to better understand the region they come from and an appreciation of the role that people from Hessle, Hull and Yorkshire have had on the world. It is all very exciting and left most of us teachers wishing that we could go back to school and study it all over again. And then Covid arrived.

It would not be true to say that our plans were wrecked but it certainly didn't help as our teachers then needed to consider how all of these exciting concepts could be taught online and then, once the students returned, the priority became 'catch up' and filling in the gaps.

Thankfully, we are just about back to 'normal' now. Attendance is on the rise, staffing is stable and we have a good understanding of where the students are in terms of prior, and covid-acquired, knowledge. We have made some adjustments but we are now able to fully deliver the curriculum in the way that we had intended. Over the coming months, we intend to share some of this content with you, alongside our school reports. This will give you a sense of what is being studied and enable you to have more informed discussions with your child about the work they are doing in school. Which brings me back to attendance.

There are so many learning opportunities available to students in schools, way beyond the five lessons per day. School sports teams are beginning to pick up fixtures more frequently, clubs are restarting and the school library has begun to offer books for loan once again. Who would want to miss any of that?

There are many reasons why students do not attend school - most are genuine illness or other exceptional circumstances but there are also some which are avoidable. Often, when we delve into the reasons why a student hasn't come to school, we discover that the reason is fairly trivial to us, although it is a major issue for the child. It often involves a peer fallout or concern about a subject lesson that the student will face that day. These are issues that can be resolved very quickly and with just a little bit of support from our student services team,

provided we know about it. Also, it is vital to minimise every session of learning. For example, if a dental appointment is made for the morning, we would expect the student to be back in school for the afternoon, and vice versa. If we all start with the expectation that we will be in school every day, we are setting the highest aspirations for ourselves.

Finally, our students have continued to follow and discuss what is going on in Ukraine. This week, some of our staff have produced blue and yellow ribbons and have been selling them in aid of the disaster relief charities and it has been nice to see students wearing these around the school. It is also inspiring to hear our young people empathising with people in Eastern Europe who are living under such horrific circumstances and wanting to show their support. I make sure I find time to discuss this with my own eleven year old son who is keen to know how this happened and what might happen next. I would rather that he lived in a world where he didn't need to think about these things but I feel a responsibility, just as we do as teachers, to ensure that our children are able to read, listen, think and empathise. Maybe that will help them to ensure that we one day live in a world where people do not go to war.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 24 - Friday 18 March 2022

Whilst on lunch duty a few weeks ago, one of our students asked me why I always walk around with a blue jacket on, carrying a walkie-talkie.

"It's to make sure we can keep you safe," I answered.

The student looked puzzled. "How does a blue jacket keep me safe?" he asked. After I had explained why myself and other staff wear bright blue jackets so that there is a visible adult to whom they can speak to if they are unwell or feel vulnerable or unsafe, I reflected upon the question. Do all the students understand what we do to keep them safe? Probably not, we felt, and so, this week, we have spent time with our students, starting with our younger ones, explaining to them all of the processes and facilities that we have to look after them. Let me share some of them with you...

When our new building opened in 2016, it was built along a very simple **open plan design**. This allows for very straight sightlines down corridors and lots of visibility over balconies and atriums. This means that just a handful of staff can supervise an entire school building when students are moving around it. In addition, we have **CCTV** installed inside and outside of the school. Behaviour in our school is good; however, we have over 1200 young people inside each day and mistakes are made. This high degree of visibility and CCTV ensures that we can investigate incidents if they arise and prevent it from happening again.

Sticking with our building layout, we operate a **one-way system** on corridors and a **keep left** route on staircases. This ensures swift and smooth movement and reduces risks of congestion and accident. Due to the straight corridors, this is easy to supervise and monitor too.

Following Covid, we retained the use of our **year-group social zones**. This is of particular benefit for our younger students who know that there is an area in which they can play and socialise without contact with older students, should they wish.

Back to the blue jackets and we have a carefully planned **duty rota** of staff during break and lunch. When I was at school in the 1980s it was very different; the teachers would sit in the staff room (playing darts and smoking, as I recall!) whilst dinner ladies tried their best to supervise us on the field and playground. I have to confess that this did not make me feel very safe, but schools are so much different nowadays. Each break and lunch, there are a **minimum of thirteen staff on duty** in busy locations, including most of the senior leadership team. This presence ensures a calm environment and means that students have plenty of staff they can speak to if necessary. I myself spend between 2-3 hours per day on duty, which is an invaluable part of my job enabling me to monitor behaviour and attitudes but, most importantly, to chat with the students about their hobbies, interests, ambitions and sometimes even their schoolwork!

Our duties cover the entire site which is marked out by our **perimeter fence** which ensures there can be no unwanted visitors during the day, as well as no temptation for students to slip out of school. At the **safeguarding gate, traffic measures** are also in place to make sure that vehicles do not pose a risk either.

Nearby, our reception team greet **visitors** but even here there are **tight controls** on who is allowed to enter the school premises and whether they may be unaccompanied or not. Students and parents can be assured that we know exactly who is on our site and what their business is.

Most of the time, students are oblivious to what we do to keep them safe, and rightly so. It is our job to think about risks - we just want them to enjoy being safe - but, every now and again, it is important that they recognise that 'school rules' have a purpose and why it is important that we all have respect for them. I can tell you that there has been some very interesting feedback from students this week, who have shared comments such as, 'oh, so that's why we are escorted to the sickbay' or 'now I understand why I have to take a longer route to the canteen at lunch' and 'I wondered what the blinking red light on the corridor was; I thought it was Santa-cam!'. Okay, I made the last one up, but we have had some very interesting conversations which we hope has made our young people feel even safer in school and have a greater respect for our school rules.

One of the highlights of this week has been the assemblies delivered on the subject of 'resilience' by English Teacher, Mrs Davison. Each day, Mrs Davison has related her own deeply personal journey from Poland, where she was born and raised, living in very poor conditions and experiencing parental alcoholism and family breakdown. She spoke of the challenges that she faced, securing herself an education, relocating to another country, dealing with the trauma of her upbringing, learning a new language and then carving for herself a highly successful career in teaching and school leadership. You could hear a pin drop as the students listened to her story. The message was that nobody has to be the product of their circumstances and, through resilience and determination, we can achieve far more than we might expect. It was very emotional and deeply affecting for the students.

And so we reach the end of another week and the prospects for the weekend and beyond are that we are set for some warm and sunny days. Our school field will be open from next week which brings a whole new dimension to schooldays, allowing students to enjoy the full site and the improving weather. Whatever you are doing this weekend, I hope you enjoy the sunshine and have a lovely weekend.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 25 - Friday 25 March 2022

I knew something wasn't quite right when I woke up on Monday morning. The weariness and lingering headache didn't really feel like any normal cold or mid-term bug. After labouring to make a cup of coffee, I grabbed a Lateral Flow Test and, two minutes later, yelled an obscenity which I won't repeat here. Suddenly, my week had been turned upside down and, rather than facing a busy but exciting week in school, I have been condemned to spending most of the week in front of a screen in my office at home, from where I am writing this now on Friday morning.

Apart from the benefit of being able to get on top of some paperwork and report-writing, it has been a frustrating week and one that I know many of you will have experienced at some point over the past two years. Of course, I have tried hard not to pass it onto my family and it has been awful not being able to hug my children or even sit and watch TV with them. Whenever there is a Test Match on, my son and I are usually inseparable in front of the TV discussing how the batters and bowlers are performing but, this week, we have been reduced to watching in different rooms and texting each other! One day, they say, we will look back and laugh at some of the things we have had to do during Covid but I'm not so sure about that.

I am not the only member of staff with the virus at the moment and my first online meeting of the day was to look at the projected number of absences we are facing next week and how we can juggle events and diaries to ensure that we have lessons and lunch duties covered. It is a stretch and will put lots of pressure on our wider staff team but, for the moment, we are able to continue normal timetables and activities. Should that change, I will of course give you as much notice as possible. Please bear this in mind if any of my colleagues are not as responsive to any queries you may have in the coming days and weeks and thank you for your support.

You would think that school leaders would spend most of their time talking about teaching and learning, or about curriculum, but you would be amazed at how much time we actually spend talking about matters that we never would have considered important when we first entered the profession.

Last Wednesday, for instance, the Senior Leadership Team spent nearly an hour discussing the length of lunchtime. This might give you a flavour of the discussion....

"So, we're back to summer lunch durations now and how is it going?" I started.

"Well the split lunch is essential now. With our larger numbers, it is the only way we can get 1200 through the canteen."

"Agreed, but do we need fifty minutes for Cohort B?"

"No, it's too long. For the last ten minutes, they're just bored."

"I would prefer a shorter lunch - 35 minutes is about right."

"But that's not long enough for the staff. If you're teaching five lessons and have a duty, that's barely enough time for a brew and a wee!"

"Agreed. Do we need to keep the staggered times? That complicates things and means that Cohort B needs to have a different duration from Cohort A."

"The stagger is vital. Again, with such high numbers of students, the stagger helps the flow around the building."

"So, we're agreed that we need the stagger. 35 minutes is too short and 50 minutes is too long. We're getting somewhere. Let's consult with staff and bring that back for a final decision. Now, which year groups should be in which cohort?"

"Well, we have five year groups so one cohort is going to be bigger than another."

"We could split a year group?"

"We could, but that reduces the social contact for the year group affected. That's not fair. I wouldn't want that for my child."

"Agreed, so we need to put three year groups together. Which ones?"

And so it went on. And these are the kind of discussions we have on so many occasions, about the school day, school uniform, behaviour strategies, school events and so on. We bring together our collective experience and wisdom (such that it is!), combine it with what we know about our students and best practice in other schools and we make decisions. It helps that many of us are parents ourselves and know how the decision of a school impacts children and family life. We don't always get things right but it is not for the want of trying and I would hope that we are confident enough to admit when we get things wrong and can make the changes we need to put it right.

I know that we have made too many changes to the structure of the school day over the past two years. Covid has forced us to make changes but we have probably over complicated things at times. This is why we are determined that the decision we reach around the school day can be a permanent one - which is why we are spending so long discussing it!

One of the advantages of sitting at home with Covid is the time it has given me to reflect on a few things and I know how important stability and certainty are when building trust between families and schools. Covid has raised the potential for that stability to be weakened but we are determined that will not be the case at our school. Change is not sudden or knee jerk. Change must not be for its own sake, it has to be progressive and result in our school being stronger and better. That is what our students need and deserve.

Have a lovely weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 26 - Friday 1 April 2022

Those of you whose children attended Penshurst Primary school may already have heard on the grapevine that Mrs Jo Spencer, who has been Head of School since 2011, will be leaving the school later this year. She has been successful in her first Headteacher interview (a very rare achievement) and will take up a Headship at another East Riding school in September. Of course, we are delighted for Jo and very proud of her successful appointment. But those sentiments are tinged with regret. Jo has been a much-valued and trusted colleague for many years, especially since I took over as Head of the all-through school, Hessle Academy, in 2019. We have worked closely together since and I hope she has found the experience as rewarding and enjoyable as I have.

But time moves on and, essentially, Jo wants to run her own school and to make her own strategic decisions about how her school develops and I completely support her with that. She will be a big loss but, when the school re-opens in September, we will continue to provide great education and care for our pupils. We will begin the recruitment process for a replacement very shortly and I will keep you posted on developments.

Next week sees the interviews for a new Deputy Headteacher at Hessle High School. This is a new post brought about due to the rise in student numbers that we have seen in recent years. We have a very strong field made up of experienced leaders, internal and external, and this time next week, I will be able to let you know who has been successful. When commencing a process such as this, I am daunted by the responsibility we take on. It reminds me of the time in 2010 when I turned up at Hessle High for an interview to be an Assistant Headteacher. I was certainly put through my paces and I often wonder what would have happened to me and my career, if I had been unsuccessful on that day. It is doubtful that I would have become a Headteacher without the influence and inspiration of people such as Andrew Jolley, Mick Davison and of course Sarah Young who made up the leadership team back then. And now it is my turn, with my team, to make a decision on Tuesday which will transform someone else's career and life. And of course, change the direction of the school in some way. It is a great responsibility and a deep privilege.

Last week, the Government published their Education White Paper, some of which was reviewed in the press. This is a pretty meagre document which pulls together a few policies that the Government were already pushing such as increased Academisation and more tutoring. Most school leaders, myself included, feel that this is a missed opportunity to build on some of the rapid innovations in technology that most schools have experienced to deliver some more ambitious changes to our schools system. But, sadly, not. The main headline was the demand for a 32.5 hour school week. The vast majority of schools offer this already and, where they don't, it is usually due to a shortened lunch period. Once again, a headline with little substance. On the positive side, we are not facing huge turmoil in our system that we did some years ago when our exams and accountability systems were turned upside down and inside out at the same time. As a school that is already an academy, which offers tuition (but would like to do more) and which delivers 32.5 hours per week, there will be little dramatic change.

Finally, with one week left until the end of term, I can report some positive news about Covid. The number of student and staff cases has dropped considerably in recent days and we are starting to see staff return to work. I was back on Tuesday and, fingers crossed, we should see most of our staff all back at some stage next week. Their resilience never fails to amaze me and hopefully we can all go into the Easter break able to enjoy our holiday with friends and family. I know that non-teachers always raise an eyebrow when we talk about the need for a holiday (I did the same before I joined the profession!) but twelve and a half weeks since Christmas has felt like twice as long and we're just about ready for a break. I know the students will be too.

Enjoy the weekend and take care.

Have a lovely weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 27 - Friday 8 April 2022

"Are you on holiday again?" asked a friend of mine when I told him that today was the end of the Spring Term. *"You have more holidays than Judith Charmers."*

Apart from being an 80s TV reference that most people won't understand, this is quite a typical response from non-teachers when they hear that we are breaking up for 'another holiday'. I have to confess that was also my sentiment before I became a teacher too. *"Thirteen weeks holiday and you finish at three o'clock? What a life?"* is still something I hear from folk. I have neither the time nor the energy to try and rebut that impression and I actually feel that the majority of people do now realise that a teacher's job is so much more than this and, if they didn't, then the months of lockdown and home schooling at least showed people how tough it is to manage and teach just one or two children, let alone a classful. But, listen, I'm not asking for any sympathy. We choose this job. Just as people who envy our holidays are more than welcome to come and join us in schools. But where there is still a misconception between those who work in schools and those who don't, is around the impact of the last few months of Covid.

The perception in many quarters is that this pandemic is over, we are all getting back to normal and the sooner we do so the better. If only that were the case in schools. To put it into perspective, we have had more positive cases since February Half Term than in the whole of the rest of the pandemic put together. Around 90% of cases are related to students and every one of these is tracked to ensure students return at the right time and, when they do, all of the staff do their best to help them 'catch up'. Alongside this, and where it relates to Year 11 and 13 students is the anxiety of the impact on their exams. This can manifest itself in young people feeling down or suffering worse symptoms of mental health. On other occasions, it shows in misbehaviour with students more irritable and prone to falling out with peers or staff. Our colleagues handle this with aplomb, every single day.

An even bigger impact is when staff are absent. A teacher's day usually consists of them standing in front of a class of thirty children for four or five lessons. When they're absent, the children are still there but someone else needs to substitute. This can either be supply staff (there are very few people available) or other staff (who all have their own jobs to do). In other words, the job still needs doing, it cannot wait. We can cope with this when there are only a handful of staff absent but when it reaches 10% or more as it has done, the impact on the rest of staff is brutal. I know that there have been times when colleagues may have struggled to return calls promptly this term and I thank you for your understanding and support.

The past few weeks have seen some great sporting successes for our girls and boys teams. Please keep in touch with these via Twitter and the Head of Year Blogs. What amazes me is not only the dedication of the students but also the staff, some of whom are running several sports teams and spending their early evenings taking students all over the

county to take part in sports. This is what schools are about and reminds me of my High School days when I struggled (mostly unsuccessfully) to make it into the Sir Henry Cooper High School Rugby League team. On the few occasions when everyone else was injured and I was selected, I used to love the minibus trips across the city to play rugby. Great times and I'm delighted that so many of our students are benefiting from this in the same way.

Finally, if we make it through the airport delays, the Groak family are heading off to Spain in the morning for a week in the sunshine. I'm delighted to hear that many of my colleagues are also heading abroad, some of them for the first time in a couple of years. Their holidays are well earned and will bring them back refreshed and ready to give their very best to our young people next term.

Whatever you are doing over the Easter break, enjoy it and take care.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 28 - Friday 29 April 2022

A few weeks ago, I reported on the success of some of our sports teams and I am delighted to tell you that this winning streak has continued across a number of sports and year groups. Yesterday afternoon, our Year 8 Boys' Football team were victorious in the East Yorkshire Cup Final against South Hunsley school. I know that Head of Year, Mrs Taylor - not normally a football fan! - has followed their run to the final with interest and she was as delighted as anyone when they returned to school with their medals and trophy. Congratulations to the boys and to their coaching staff, Mr Griffiths, Mr Adams and Mr Read.

Also in Year 8, the Boys' Rugby League team, led by Mr Compton, achieved a big win over Sirius Academy on Tuesday, winning by 40-16. This victory has earned them a place in the Cup Final which will take place in the coming weeks. Another great success which shows we have some real sporting talent in Year 8.

Elsewhere, in Year 9, another of our Boys' Rugby League teams were also victorious, this time over the boys from Sirius Academy North, winning 44-12. They will now also play in the Cup final once their opponents are known.

In recent years, we have had great success in providing rugby league players for the professional game. Jez Litten (Hull KR) and Brad Fash and Jordan Lane (both Hull FC) all came through the school in recent years and it was great to see Jordan captaining the Hull FC team last weekend for the first time. I am sure these role models (and they were fantastic lads when they were at school) will continue to inspire the boys currently playing in Years 8 and 9 to achieve even greater success.

Another of our alumni has also been in the news lately. Lucy Beaumont is an ex-student who has achieved great success as a comedian and TV star. Her most recent project, Hullraisers, has recently been showing on Channel 4 and is earning some good reviews showing that it is possible for our students to find success in a wide and varied walks of life.

Of course, the future stars are still with us in school and I can report that we have had a very smooth return to school this week. Year 11 in particular have quickly adapted to the reality

that their exams have already begun in some subjects whilst our other year groups are responding well to the expectation that the very best behaviours are expected of them in order that Year 11 (and Year 13) are not distracted in any possible way from the tasks that lay ahead for them.

Thankfully also we have reported very very few positive Covid cases. Long may this continue and we sincerely hope that the examination period can therefore go ahead with no major disruption for the first time since 2019.

Finally, I am delighted to be able to announce that, from September, Hessle Academy will have an additional Deputy Headteacher. The growth of our school in recent years (approximately 25% increase in numbers on roll over the past four years) means that, not only have we needed more classroom teachers, but we also decided that additional senior leadership is required. The recruitment process took place before Easter and Ashley Chapman has been appointed. Ashley is currently an Assistant Headteacher at Archbishop Sentamu School and has worked in several other Hull schools. He lives in the local area and is firmly committed to continuing to drive up standards at Hessle Academy. I am sure you will get the opportunity to meet Ashley early in the new Academic year.

Tomorrow is an important day in the Groak household as my daughter, Ebony, will be going to her first ever Hull FC fixture. She has been relatively slow to acquire the bug but, at the age of seven, she has now declared herself ready to 'go to rugby with daddy'. Sadly, this means that I will have to forsake my pre-match pint and visit the bouncy castles in West Park instead but it will be worth it to see another Groak in a black and white shirt!

Whatever you are doing over the Bank Holiday, enjoy it.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 29 - Friday 6 May 2022

I have written in this blog before about the value of uniform and why I believe it plays an important role in a child's sense of place. Most important of all, a school uniform is a great leveller, enabling young people to thrive and excel through their talents and their character. The distraction of what to wear is a significant one for all young people and, when they have no real choice on that matter during a school week, it means that they can focus on matters of greater importance. That is my personal view and it is the school's firm position on uniform.

Uniform, however, also extends to matters such as jewellery, piercings etc. It is a common point raised by students, and some parents, often sadly with the assistance of low-quality media, which asks, 'what has my hair colour got to do with my learning?' At face value, it is a reasonable question and one that we seek to answer for students as we can understand where it comes from.

We answer it thus; your hairstyle is a personal choice and, for many young people, it is a way of expressing their personality or may be an important element of their faith or ethnicity.

When these choices are made within a range of what is acceptable, they provoke very little comment and are personal to the individual. However, if we permit young people to choose any form of hair style or accessorisation then this becomes a distraction from learning. It becomes a discussion point and, in some cases, it becomes something that other children seek to copy, placing a burden on parents. Collectively, the staff at Hessle have worked across a very wide range of educational settings and we have seen schools which adopt a more relaxed approach to uniform, hair styles, jewellery and so on. In the vast majority of cases, the staff in these schools spend a disproportionate amount of time dealing with issues arising from bullying, peer disputes, damage to personal property, parental complaints and other non-learning matters. I hope that you feel our uniform policy promotes high standards. Each day, I stand near the front gate and am delighted to see such high standards of dress and compliance with our uniform policy. Our students are smart, comfortable and, most important of all, ready to learn without distractions.

When it comes to uniform, we therefore have several aims. Ensuring that we maintain those high standards and, if and when we do change it, making sure that we communicate early and clearly. Equally, we want to ensure that it is affordable.

Recently, legislation was passed in Parliament to ensure that schools paid strict attention to the costs of school uniform. This was slightly misreported as an attack on uniform in some parts of the press. The target of this legislation are the small number of schools which insist that uniform is bought from one monopolistic supplier or that most items of uniform are branded. The consequence of this is often extremely expensive outlay for parents which can deter some families from choosing such schools. We believe that the cost of uniform should never prevent a parent from choosing to send their child to our school and, in my time at Hessle, I have never heard that has ever been the case.

We know that several schools in Hull and the East Riding have introduced branded trousers and/or skirts. Whilst I understand the reasons for doing so, we decided that the cost of these items for parents would be prohibitive. We have, therefore, maintained our uniform expectations for next year which prescribe a branded blazer, tie and sportswear, but allows parents the choice of using alternative suppliers for shirts, trousers, skirts and shoes.

Prior to this, we undertook a review of the cost of our uniform for 2022-23. Using our approved supplier for branded items (blazer, tie, sports kit and hoody) and a supermarket for other items that may be required throughout the year (six shirts, four pairs of trousers or skirts and two pairs of shoes), the cost would be approximately **£145** for a boy and around **£152** for a girl wearing a skirt (although they may choose to wear trousers instead).

For an entirely unbranded school uniform (i.e. blazer bought from a supermarket with no badge, no branded sportswear etc) the cost would be **£95** for a uniform with trousers and **£101** for a uniform with a skirt.

The maximum overall difference between the branded and unbranded uniform for a boy or a girl is therefore **£51**. While we recognise that this still may present a challenge for some families, we believe that, providing our uniform expectations are presented to families in a consistent and reasonable time frame, it is possible to budget for this cost. Importantly, the cost of a uniform is significantly lower than no uniform at all, which would place parents at the mercy of whatever fashions were of the moment.

Furthermore, each year we work closely with our uniform supplier and families to support those that struggle to provide uniform for their child. In addition to the support offered by Rawcliffes and the school, I have also known of some of our staff personally buying uniform

for some children or laundering it to help families out. This kind of support happens up and down the country in schools and is sadly not reported when the media wish to portray schools as profiting from uniform sales.

We are living in a time where the rising cost of living is affecting everyone and this will hit those on the lowest incomes especially hard. We stand with those families and will do everything we can to support them with the costs of uniform whilst also ensuring that every child can arrive in school smartly dressed and ready to focus on their learning and development.

As always, your support with uniform on a daily basis is hugely appreciated. Thank you.

Finally, this week we were overwhelmed with applications for places on our Key Stage 3 Geography trips. Thankfully, we were able to offer additional dates and more spaces for those that wished to participate. This shows the pent-up desire for students to get out and explore wider learning opportunities. Unfortunately, in underestimating the demand, we caused some anxiety to families who felt that they were going to miss out on this opportunity and I apologise for that.

Normally, for popular trips (as this turned out to be) we operate an 'expression of interest' system which allows for a window of time in which people can register their interest in attending a trip. This allows all families the chance to receive, open and process the initial letter from school, rather than just those that have easiest access to a PC. Once the expressions of interest window is open it enables all families an equal chance of obtaining a place on the trip. As I said, we did not give advance notice of this process on this occasion, we should have done and I apologise. In the event, we hope that all Year 7 and Year 8 students who wish to go on the trip will be able to.

Some of you got in touch to ask me how my daughter's first visit to a Super League game went last Saturday and I have to tell you that she loved it, especially the bouncy castles in West Park and meeting the Airlie Bird mascot. She was attending because my son was recovering from an operation and so we had a spare season pass. The upshot of all of that is that I now need another season pass and my Saturday afternoons spent with my pals have become something quite different altogether!

Enjoy the weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 30 - Friday 13 May 2022

Amidst the pomp of the Queen's Speech this week was reference to the new Schools Bill that the Government intends to bring into law in the next year. The arrival of a new Schools Bill generates mixed emotions in schools; potentially it has the power to bring change for the good but all too often it is used to make politicians appear that they are doing something to improve discipline or to tackle what some of them believe are lazy teachers and/or problem students.

Sadly this latest version is much the same. Most of its content seems to focus on the Government's drive for further academisation. I am quite ambivalent about this. As someone who leads a school that operates in a medium sized MAT, I see the benefits of collaboration first hand. During Covid, the support that the Headteachers provided to each other was invaluable and this working-together approach filters down to all levels of our schools and continues post-Covid. But this does not mean that it is suitable for all schools and there are very many examples of schools achieving fantastic outcomes and standards whilst being under Local authority control. Take two of our local schools as examples; neither Beverley Grammar or Beverley High School are academies and yet they consistently achieve great outcomes and both recently achieved an 'Outstanding' judgement from Ofsted. Under the Government's plans, by 2030, both of these schools would have to make significant changes to the way that they are run and I would simply ask, 'why?'

Much of the [rest of the bill](#) seems to focus on pupil attendance which is certainly something that needs addressing but there doesn't appear to be any real substance to how they propose to do this and the Bill seems merely seeks to name and shame families who are having difficulty in getting their children into school, and to place more burden on schools to publish what they are doing rather than a proper programme of financially-supported collaboration to find out, and implement, what actually works.

Attendance at Hesse fell during covid - at some points it was around 85%. It is recovering now but is still 2-3% below pre-covid levels. The main reasons for this are the lack of resilience that some students have, having spent so long away from the routines of school, as well as the hugely complex challenges faced by some parents who are locked in a toxic situation which often combines unemployment, poverty and family breakdown. Add to that a pandemic and cost of living crisis and I cannot imagine how difficult that must be to keep a family going. Of course, most families cope admirably through setbacks but there are others who need more support and this Bill provides none of that support.

Dealing with attendance is a thorny issue and I have written before about the limited amount of discretion that I have by law to authorise absence. And yet, we try to be sympathetic to difficult family situations. What we, and families need, is not targets or directives, but properly funded support.

I went to a teacher's conference recently where the Education Secretary, Nadim Zahawi, talked about the work that he expects schools to help improve life chances and to lift people out of poverty. To which a Headteacher stood up and asked him, "why don't you just stop putting them into poverty in the first place?" Quite.

Finally, next week sees the start of the GCSE exams for Year 11 students. Whilst most of them have been completing coursework and doing practical and speaking exams for weeks, the first exam in the Sports Hall is always a seminal moment for them and their teachers. It is also a strange time for teachers and leaders - the first time since May 2019 that formal external exams have been held. Thankfully, we haven't forgotten what to do and the usual support package has already been wheeled into action. Students will follow bespoke timetables for the next five weeks as they combine exams with focused revision lessons. All students will remain in school full time until their last exam and, if you are the parent of a Year 11 (or 13) student right now, your support in encouraging, reassuring and organising your child will benefit them enormously so that they can concentrate on the task ahead. It has never been more important for exam-year students to follow healthy routines - eating well, staying hydrated, following regular sleep patterns. These are at least as important as any revision that they do. It will not be long before it is over for them but for the next few weeks, I wish you as parents the very best of luck in living with them!

Enjoy the weekend and hopefully the sun will be shining.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 31 - Friday 20 May 2022

Last week, I held assemblies with the students. The subject I chose to talk about was 'aspiration' and I wanted to explore what I feel this word really means. It can often be interpreted as meaning a desire to achieve a particular status in life. I used to aspire to be an airline pilot, before that I wanted to play rugby league for Hull FC and cricket for Yorkshire. But in these fast changing times, it is almost impossible for students to visualise the type of jobs, careers or places they want to be when they are ten years older, let alone for the rest of their lives.

To me, and to us at Hessle High School, 'aspiration' means setting yourself the highest standards and taking no shortcuts. It also means being prepared to step outside of your comfort zone and taking a controlled risk. This was my life journey, and it was the story I told the students. I started by showing them a picture of myself aged 12. At that age, I told them, I was the most awkward, shy boy you could imagine. I had no real confidence in myself and, apart from being quite bright, I had no aptitude for sport, music or much else. And that was me, for several years. Until I met a teacher who said that I ought to go to university. My parents knew that I was clever but they had never been to university themselves and had no clue how to make it happen. Thankfully, they found a way to back me and, aged 18, I left home to go and study at Leeds Polytechnic (it wasn't even a proper university, back in those days!). At first, I shied away from student life and even once I had made new friends, it still didn't give me much in the way of aspiration for achieving anything significant. But, crucially, because I had taken a controlled risk of leaving home, I had built some confidence and was able to take the next step in my life. Which was to travel.

In the years to come I travelled more and more, often travelling alone, and delving deeper into Asia. In between trips, I also took the step of setting up my own business. The combination of solo travel and running a business gave me independence and self-confidence that I never had as a child. And then came teaching and school leadership.

My message to the students is that we are all capable of growth, and of moving ourselves out of the situation we find ourselves in. All it takes is a little 'aspiration' to be better, and the preparedness to take a small risk. Once you take those first steps, you are on your way.

Of course, I didn't know that when I was 12. Which is why we encourage our staff to have these conversations with our students. Recently, Mrs Davison talked to students about her experience of growing up in poverty in Poland and making a life for herself in the UK; Mr Scott spoke emotionally about his experiences at the hands of bullies at school and how he handled the situation and used it to make him stronger. As well as teaching them English, Maths, History or French, we also know the importance of just talking to students about life, and our own lives are endlessly fascinating to our students. We can all do this with young people, sometimes our own children but those of others. It is powerful to a young person.

The first week of external exams have gone very well and Year 11s appear much more relaxed than they were a week ago. Next week is especially busy and I am grateful not only

to parents of Year 11 students but to all of you for ensuring that all of our students are fully supported with uniform, equipment and the like. When our younger students are 'on track', it allows the staff to give that extra bit of focus to Year 11 and 13 students when they need it most.

As the weather warms up, please ensure that your child always brings a drink to school (water is best). We have a number of locations for them to fill this up throughout the day and not only does this save you money in buying bottled water but also ensures that they stay hydrated.

The weather looks fine for the weekend; I hope you enjoy it.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 32 - Friday 27 May 2022

In a school building of over 1300 students and 150 adult staff, the only way of operating harmoniously is for everyone to adopt one of our core values: kindness. Kindness is a virtue in short supply in our world right now and we firmly believe that in order to instil this into our young people, it is our responsibility as adults to model it every moment of every day. No matter how we feel inside!

The small acts of kindness that take place between our staff on a daily basis are truly wonderful to see. Lately, many of our staff have spent much of their time - lessons, and non-contact time - working with year 11 and 13 students in preparation for their examinations. In order to make this happen it is now commonplace to see other colleagues covering their break duties, nipping down to the canteen to grab lunch for them or just making them a hot cup of tea and delivering it to their room. The little things go a long way and when they are seen by our students, they carry even more weight.

Recently, we have adopted a 'Friday feedback' quick survey inviting staff to identify anything that has caused them a problem during the previous week or anything they are concerned about for the week ahead. Often these are operational issues such as photocopiers that can't do the job they were designed to do quickly or to spot a colleague who faces a particularly busy week so that we can try and help them out. It works well. We also ask staff to nominate a colleague who has done an act of kindness for them and I will then say 'thank you' on their behalf and on behalf of the school. This is a great pleasure and it gives the recipient a real boost. It is one of the great privileges of my job to be able to pass on praise to my staff, such as I was able to do the other day when a parent stopped me outside the school and paid a tribute to Mrs Coss, our Maths Teaching Assistant who had done such great work tutoring her daughter. When I relayed this to Mrs Coss, she smiled from ear to ear.

Finally, after half term, we will be welcoming our first Ukrainian refugee to our school, who will be going into Year 8. In recent weeks, my colleagues have held several meetings with the family, as well as their local sponsor family, to assess their needs and to determine what support will be needed. Over the coming weeks, we anticipate several more refugees will also be joining us, including at Peshurst and into our Sixth Form. When the time is right, we will hope to share some of their stories with our students so that we can all learn from the

experience of offering them refuge and a safe place to study and thrive. It is a humbling responsibility but one we are proud to undertake.

And so we reach half-term with the weather unsettled. My mum always says that 'it can't make its mind up', but I hope that, regardless of the weather, you have some nice things planned for the extended Jubilee Bank Holiday weekend.

Have a lovely break and take care.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 33 - Friday 10 June 2022

Ласкаво просимо в Hessle!

(Welcome to Hessle!)

This week has seen the arrival of our first two Ukrainian students to Hessle High School and it has been great to have them with us. Both Year 8 students, Mira and Miroslava, turned up on Monday morning with their parents looking immaculate in their school uniforms and delighted to be able to resume their schooling after a period of time in their lives that we can barely imagine. A great deal of work has already gone into preparing for their arrival - thankfully, we have members of staff in school that can speak Ukrainian, Russian and Polish and these language skills have been invaluable in helping us to understand the needs of the children and their families so that we can get them settled into school.

We also have some marvellous students from Eastern Europe and these have been wonderful in helping to bridge the language gap and ensuring that Mira and Miroslava have begun to get to know the other students in their tutor group and in their teaching classes. We are also fortunate to have the services of Mrs Ridley in school who has worked with students of many nationalities over the years and who is very adept at integrating students with English as an additional language into our school, whilst also providing them with translation support. The rule of thumb is that younger students benefit from being integrated fully as soon as possible; 'thrown in at the deep end' in other words, so that they can quickly learn the language from mixing with other students.

As they settle into the school, we look forward to getting to know them better and learning more about their country and their culture, to the benefit of our whole school community. We know of several other families that are currently settling into the area and who are intending to send their children to our school and we look forward to welcoming them too.

At last the sunshine has arrived. Our school site is glorious on clear sunny days like today and it is fantastic to see the students enjoying the entirety of our school, playing sports or just sitting on the field chatting with friends. Let's hope it continues.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 34 - Friday 17 June 2022

Sometimes it is just the smallest act of kindness that makes it all worthwhile. This week, it has been quite common to see students arriving at school in the morning with present bags or bunches of flowers. And then, at the end of the day, we have seen staff colleagues heading to their cars with the same flowers and gifts. This week, I myself received a bar of Latvian chocolate from a Year 13 student who I have taught and who wanted to share with me a chocolate bar from his home country. These small gifts do wonders for teachers and support staff and demonstrate that the hard work that they have put into supporting and teaching our young people really are appreciated.

But we do not need to be given a gift to be appreciated. Last week, Mrs Newman, Assistant Head of Year 9, left us to take up a position elsewhere. On her final few days, various students from her year group came to find her to wish her well, to thank her and to give her gifts. The item that touched her the most was a handmade card that had been put together by a couple of dozen students, some of whom had not always seen eye-to-eye with Mrs Newman (to put it mildly). Each of them had written a lovely, heartfelt message which really summed up the importance of the relationships that our staff have with students. The one that struck home the best for me was the one that simply said, "Whatever it is, u just sort it. Thanx.' 'Thank you's' go a long way and are really appreciated. Thanks also to those of you that sent best wishes to Mrs Newman and to those that have contacted the school to thank staff for the support of your child in Year 11 and Year 13.

Mrs Todd (Head of Year 10) has written to her parents reiterating our uniform policy and especially that which relates to girl's choice of skirts. It is always tempting as we get close to the end of the school year to lower our expectations around school uniform but that is not, and never will be, our stance. Our students expect to be taught well until the very last day of term and so we, in return, expect the highest of standards from them. Please continue to support us with this and ensure that your child is wearing the correct uniform at all times before they leave home and that they know you will support us if they breach these policies. This also applies to the wearing of jewellery, choice of hair colour and styles and piercings etc.

I wrote previously in this blog of my admiration for Bruce Springsteen and those of you that share this passion will know that he is going on the road again in 2023. To date, only European dates have been announced and so, a few weeks ago, I checked out the dates and looked at when I could realistically get to a show overseas. Most shows sold out in minutes and the only availability was a single ticket for a show in Sweden. And so, my 2023 Bruce Springsteen tour to date will consist of me travelling alone to Gothenberg on a Saturday next June. I don't have any flights yet but I am going for it - and my excitement knows no bounds! My wife thinks I'm mad and the kids think I'm weird but, hey ho, you only live once!

Have a lovely weekend and hopefully you can avoid the thunderstorms!

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 35 - Friday 24 June 2022

Many of you will know that I am a season ticket holder at Hull FC and, when they win a game, it is rarely because of any individual achievement and is more likely to be achieved by team discipline and the fact that they 'played for eighty minutes'. This saying is a bit of cliché but it speaks to a real truth in that success in sport usually comes down to executing the plans you devised in training and staying disciplined right until the final whistle blows. The same can be said for students and staff in school. Our curriculum is not planned to be delivered in 30 weeks or even 35. It will take us the full 38 weeks of the school year in order to deliver our planned curriculum. Gone are the days when the final weeks of term would involve bringing games into school or watching videos. There are plenty of other fun and enriching activities for students to enjoy at this time of year, such as our trips to the coast and Sports Day, and it won't be long before they have six weeks off school. For those reasons, they, and you, will rightly expect us to teach them until the end of term. And the same expectations apply to our students. In recent weeks, we have spoken collectively to students about 'playing for eighty minutes' and staying disciplined all year around. It is important, not just for their education but also for the development of professional habits, that they maintain high levels of attendance and continue to wear their uniform correctly all year. We will urge them to do this and are delighted that they respond positively to this.

I thank you for your support with this. Each year, I speak to a small number of parents who are not happy that their child has faced a sanction for coming into school with the wrong uniform on or with inappropriate jewellery/nails etc, and invariably it is at this time of year when the temptation is there to lower standards. Our standards are high and I make no apologies for that; it is one of the reasons why we are so vastly oversubscribed and have waiting lists of parents that want to send their child to our school. I know that you value those standards and so I thank you for supporting us in upholding them.

On the subject of standards, I must remind parents that my discretion in authorising term-time holidays or other periods of absence is extremely limited by law and can only be done with plenty of notice and with supporting evidence. This can lead to very tricky conversations if a parent has already taken their child out of school and then asks me to authorise the absence with minimal evidence. The safest option is always to plan absences during school holidays or on weekends; I know that may not always tie in with parent work patterns and that holidays at that time are expensive (I know - I haven't had anything other than an expensive holiday for over 20 years!) but they are not reasons that I can legally authorise an absence. Thanks again for your support.

Finally, those of you that drop your child off at school will see another new face on the school site from Monday morning. Ashley Chapman will be joining the school as our new Deputy Headteacher next week as part of our expanded leadership team. He will be our strategic pastoral leader, working closely with Mrs Anderson and Mr Sinclair to provide students and families with the best standards in respect of safeguarding, SEND, behaviour and personal development. I am sure you will all get to meet him in due course and he is keen to join us and get started.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 36 - Friday 1 July 2022

It is said that Barack Obama, when President of the USA, only ever wore a grey or a blue suit. He would explain the reason by saying that, "I have too many other decisions to make so I don't want to have to make decisions about what I eat or what I wear."

I don't have to make anything like as many (nor important) decisions as the ex-President but I can understand the concept that is often called 'decision fatigue'; there are days when I sit in lots of meetings where it falls to me to make a choice between two or more options (which sometimes seem absolutely identical to me!) and then when I get home the last thing I want to do is choose what to eat, or what to do with the children. That's why I will eat whatever is put in front of me and do whatever the children ask me to do.

And 'decision fatigue' is one of the reasons why I am so committed to school uniform. Bear with me, while I explain.

A bit like Obama, I only have a handful of suits for work, I always wear a white shirt and have perhaps a dozen ties to choose from. It takes me less than five minutes to get ready for work in the morning. Meanwhile, my wife - who is Head of Languages at our school - has to choose between a seemingly endless wardrobe of options, giving consideration to the weather, how much walking she will have to do and - improbably for me to understand - what other people might also be wearing. I don't know how she does it each morning but I would not wish that kind of distraction on anyone, certainly not our students, especially when making the 'wrong' clothing choice could make them feel uncomfortable in front of their peers. Which is why we insist on school uniform, properly worn without adornments or jewellery.

It is often suggested that a school uniform restricts a child's ability to express themselves. This is absolute nonsense. Yesterday evening when I left school, there were over a hundred of our students preparing to take part in 'Battle of the Bands' and 'Primary Performing Arts Showcase' both amazing experiences and events in which students are able to express themselves artistically, creatively - and in what they choose to wear!

Next week, we have a coachful of students heading to London for a Theatre trip - they will visit several theatres, see great performances and enjoy the sights of the Capital city. They will express their personalities through their interactions and their friendships - not in how they are dressed!

We also have - every weekday - sports teams representing our school, with great passion and success. One of our boys - a Year 9 student - has recently been signed up to schoolboy terms with Hull Kingston Rovers after just a few weeks of playing rugby league. He follows a steady stream of ex-students that have even gone onto play the sport professionally, demonstrating how it is also possible to express yourself through sporting prowess and effort.

None of the aforementioned students need to spend any time each day thinking about what to wear; instead they can focus on learning and pursuing their interests in music, drama and sport. The way it should be.

It is tragic when the local media (and it happens across the country) tries to shame schools with headlines such as, "My daughter was sent home for wearing jeans" - usually followed by

a comment from a parent along the lines of, 'how does wearing jeans affect her learning?' Whenever a headline such as this lands on Hull Live, I always check the comments section at the end which reliably responds in favour of the school. This always reassures me that the general view is in favour of high standards and school uniform.

At Hessle High, we enjoy very high levels of compliance with school uniform and we know that you will support us with this now and in the future. Please encourage your child to continue with these high standards in the remaining three weeks of term and also into next year. We are making no changes to uniform next year but will be expecting all students to wear it correctly all of the time.

Finally, this evening is the Year 11 Prom - our opportunity to help our students celebrate their time in school before they move onto pastures new, albeit half of them will be returning to our Sixth Form. It will be great to see them relax and celebrate and I thank the parents of those that are coming for your support as well for making it such a successful event. See you later amongst the limousines!

And thank you all for your continued support.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 37 - Friday 8 July 2022

This week I have spent even more time than normal in the company of my fellow Headteachers in The Consortium Academy Trust (TCAT). School academisation is a topic that most people outside of schools probably give little time to thinking about but, within the sector, it is of huge significance. The governance of a school has a major bearing not only on how the school is run but also its capacity for improvement. Before I go any further, a potted history might be in order.

Under the previous Headteacher, Sarah Young, Hessle High School formed together with Penshurst Primary School to create a 3-19 through-school (The Hessle Academy). There are only 170 of these in the country and even less than that have both a nursery and a Sixth Form like we do. Indeed, as I write this, my train is pulling into Newcastle station on my way to a conference of through schools to be held at a local school. In 2016, as the forces of academisation swept through the sector most schools like ours began to look for partners with whom we could form our own Academy Trust chains. At the time, there existed a handful of huge Trusts that were quickly swallowing up individual schools and imposing their educational ethos on them. That can work for some schools, but I firmly agreed with Sarah Young that The Hessle Academy needed greater control over its own destiny and so, soon after, an agreement was reached with the Headteachers of Cottingham and Wolfreton Schools to form a Trust. It didn't take long for other schools to recognise that the ethos was right for them and soon, Howden School, Winifred Holtby and Holderness Academy joined up. Along the way, Croxby and Keyingham Primary Schools also joined us.

Being a part of a medium sized Trust such as ours is a terrific opportunity for every member of staff to collaborate to really good effect. Geographically our schools are close to one

another (which helps) and our contexts are also quite similar. Collaboration is not without its problems at times and there are occasions when we have to make a change for the greater good but the bigger picture is that we are much stronger together.

A couple of examples spring to mind. Firstly, during Covid, the network of Headteachers was invaluable and, along with other senior colleagues, the ability to share ideas and concerns with peers in other schools kept us on track, and probably kept us sane. Secondly, the collaboration between Hessle, Cottingham and Wolfreton over our Sixth Form Partnership continues to thrive. In recent months, we have also added Holderness Academy to the partnership and a significant re-branding is about to be launched which will see the partnership grow even further. The value of this cannot be overstated to Hessle students who consider the Sixth Form as an option. Currently, we teach 18 different A Levels and Post-16 courses on our site; but, with the partnership, students can actually choose from over 30 different courses by splitting their week between the schools and making use of the free transport available. It is a unique opportunity and a great deal for students who relish the opportunity both to stay at Hessle where they know the staff but also to visit different campuses and meet new students - a perfect preparation for life at University!

It also has the benefit of retaining some of our very best staff who we know continue to stay at Hessle because of the reward they gain from teaching A Level classes. This benefits all students in the school, regardless of year group and regardless of whether they intend to stay in the Sixth Form. Without the partnership, it is possible that our Sixth Form College might cease to exist and so it has been a real pleasure to spend time with Trust colleagues planning the next stages of our joint development this week.

This week, we have welcomed parents of Year 10 students to school for an Information Evening. This set out the plans we have in store for students as they make the transition into Year 11 from September. This is the first of two evenings where this message will be explained and, if you missed the first, please try to make the next one in September.

The coming week also sees our Year 6 pupils visit the school for Transition Week and I really look forward to meeting them and, hopefully, if you are one of their parents, seeing you on Wednesday afternoon when I give a talk about our school. It is always a pleasure to welcome visitors to our school and Wednesday will be no exception.

Before anyone asks about my trip to Newcastle, this is not a roundabout way of making sure I am in town for the rugby league Magic Weekend. I will be back in Hull on Friday night and in front of my TV on Sunday night for the rugby league derby. I am not optimistic given the injuries and suspensions that Hull FC have at the moment but anything can happen in a derby. But, if I look unusually grumpy on the gate on Monday morning, now you know why!

Have a lovely weekend and thank you as ever for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 38 - Friday 15 July 2022

As we approach the end of term, our overriding concern is to ensure a safe and comfortable environment for our students next week when the temperatures are forecast to reach 35

degrees by Tuesday. I have written to parents today with the news that we have had to cancel Sports Day; we will look to reschedule and, if this is possible, will keep you informed. We have also made some revisions to uniform and will not expect students to wear blazer or tie. If they come to school in a loose-fitting white cotton shirt, preferably short sleeved, and spend most of the day in the shade or indoors, this is the best approach. We will ensure that plenty of water is available and ask that parents make sure students have their own water bottle which they can refill during the day.

We have spoken to all students this week about taking responsibility for their own wellbeing next year and ensuring they stay out of the sun and drink plenty of water. We will, of course, monitor this too.

Students with medical conditions will be monitored very closely and if you have any concerns about your child's health during these high temperatures, please contact the school hhsoffice@hessleacademy.com

Thank you in advance for your support and I hope we can enjoy the weather as long as we keep safe. Of course, we do live in England and it may be that it rains for two days instead, but better safe than sorry!

The forecast for Wednesday is for a cooler day and so all students need to be in normal uniform from Wednesday onwards. Even though it is the end of term, I am delighted to see such high standards of uniform across all year subjects and we thank you for your continued support with uniform standards.

As you know, the school year ends next Friday and we will mark this with a tutor group party from 1pm and then all students will leave at 1.45pm.

There is much to inform you about with regards to the new school year and so I will be writing an end-of-term newsletter which will include information on key dates etc, to arrive with you no later than Thursday next week.

In the meantime, try to enjoy the weather safely and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 39 - Friday 22 July 2022

It is customary that I write to all parents and carers at this time of year to set out any major changes that you need to be aware of ahead of the new school year. I hope you find this information useful. If you have any further questions, do not hesitate to contact the school.

It has been another tumultuous year for everyone associated with the school. Covid has cast a long shadow and this was felt at its worst back in January when we were hit with a significant wave of infections with over 450 students absent from school during that month, along with dozens of staff. The impact was not just immediate; the knock-on effects of the missed learning and social interaction have taken most of the year to unravel and, for many, are still continuing. I am indebted to my incredible staff for keeping the ship sailing and providing the students with the very best teaching, learning and pastoral care that they can under the circumstances. We hope that the impact of Covid will diminish in the new year and we can

return fully to 'normal'. Like all schools, we do not dwell on this with students; we try instead to praise them for their resilience and celebrate their successes.

Another big impact, which I have written about several times this year, comes from our growth in student numbers. In September 2017, we had 1002 students on roll in Years 7 to 13. This September, we expect that figure to exceed 1350 - a 35% increase in just 5 years. This is great news for the school and allows us to grow our staffing, benefit from economies of scale and ensure that we can offer specialist services in school (such as careers and wellbeing workers) that some schools cannot afford. It also protects some of the smaller, niche subjects such as music, languages etc that can sometimes be unviable in smaller schools. We are prepared for September and have recruited well - a mixture of experienced teachers who have joined us from local and regional schools, as well as some who will be new to the profession. It is an exciting time and I look forward to you meeting these new staff in due course.

The past few weeks have been very busy with educational trips going off site. We have had students visiting Bridlington, Filey and Dalby Forest (Geography trips), the National Space Centre (Science) and the London Theatre trip, to name but a few. The Acklams coach will need its own parking space in a morning at this rate! Part of our school vision, and pledge to our students, is that they get the opportunity to go on school visits to places they might not normally get the chance to see, especially with friends and teachers. There is nothing like a school trip for energising the students and staff and building those relationships that are so valuable. And we want these experiences to be as inclusive as possible; to that end, we have earmarked a budget for next year to support those families who might not otherwise be able to afford for their child to take part. We know that household finances are extremely tight at the moment and we do not want this to be a barrier to cultural development.

Finally, at the end of this week, we will be saying 'goodbye' to a number of valued colleagues and friends who are leaving us for pastures new. I am sure you will join me in wishing 'Good Luck' to Mr Smith (Biology) who is taking up a post at Hymers College; Mrs Davison and Mrs Etheridge (both English) who have both been appointed as Assistant Headteachers at Cottingham High School; Mr Willis (Physics) who is taking up a teaching post in his hometown of Bridlington and who will save a fortune in petrol!; Mr Simmons (Science) who is leaving us at the end of a temporary contract; Mrs Burrows (French/Spanish) who is moving out of teaching to join an Educational Consultant company; Mr Read (Cover Supervisor) who will take up his first job as a Teacher of PE and to three of our Teaching Assistants, Miss Hodgson, Miss Burke, Mrs Richie-Goodrick. Miss Hodgson will be starting a teacher training programme, Miss Burke will leave us at the end of a temporary contract and Mrs Ritchie-Goodrick who is joining the Specialist Behaviour Hub school. Finally, to Mrs Ward (Engineering and Technology) who is retiring and who tells me that she will be jetting off on holiday in September when we are all returning to school! Whilst we will be sad to see them go, we are grateful for the contribution they have made to our school and our students and wish them all the very best for the future.

Next Wednesday, the Groak family will be on a plane to Rome and then onto Greece where we are visiting Athens and some of the Islands. I love my job but I would be lying if I said I wasn't counting the hours! Wherever the summer takes you, I wish you all a happy and relaxing time and look forward to seeing you all again during the new school year to come.

Thanks for all of your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

Return to School

Monday 5 September - Staff training day, no students in school

Tuesday 6 September - Year 7 and 11 students return - Year 12 and 13 return for induction

Wednesday 7 September - All students in school

Key Dates and Events

Please find Key Dates and Events for the year ahead [here](#) This is subject to change and we will keep the [calendar and event](#) section on our website up to date and alert you to any changes.

School Day

As our student numbers have grown in recent years, it has become necessary to continue with a split lunch and break. This allows students to have swift access to food at these times and keeps the queues as low as possible.

Mobile Phones

Our policy on mobile phones and other devices remains the same as in previous years. Students are permitted to bring them into school and may use them outside of the school buildings during break and lunchtimes. However, between 8.15 am and 3.30 pm, they must be 'Off and Away' inside the school buildings. This has proved to be very successful in recent years and students have found many other activities to do instead of using their phones. Your cooperation with this is greatly appreciated.

Learning Platform

A reminder that our online learning and communication platform will change from Google Classroom to Microsoft this summer. All students have been fully trained by the ICT staff in readiness for this change and will, from September, be using this new platform to access their emails and school work. If you have any questions or concerns about this please contact us.

School Uniform

There are no substantive changes to school uniform for September. We continue to insist on high standards of uniform and expect all students to wear the correct uniform at all times. Please note that our approved provider, Rawcliffes Schoolwear, has recently relocated and now operates from:

17 Savile St, Hull, HU1 3EF

01482 223539

Each year we are asked about suitability of shoes. We would strongly recommend that all parents choose a formal shoe; however, we recognise that some families may struggle to afford a 'school shoe' in addition to footwear that might be worn out of school. For that reason, we accept a range of different shoe types, providing that they are black and polishable. We have produced a detailed visual aid to help you make the correct choice of uniform this summer. This can be found [here](#). Our school uniform policy can be found [here](#)

Results Days

We are looking forward to celebrating the successes of our Year 11 and 13 students in August when external results are announced.

A Level results day will take place on Thursday 18 August and all students are welcome on site from 9am. Advice and guidance will of course be on hand for students once they have their results.

GCSE results day will take place on Thursday 25 August. All students are welcome on site from 9am. Results will be handed out on the main plaza and this will be followed by enrolment into Hessle Sixth Form College. There will also be plenty of staff on hand to provide further advice and guidance for students regardless of their chosen destination.

We will write to students directly with more details of how this will work so please encourage them to check their school emails in the next few days!

Communications

Over the Summer we are moving to a new Management Information System called Arbor. Please note that when we send email communications to you from Arbor - the email 'sender' will be office@hessleacademy.com

School Meal Tariff

Due to the rising costs of food ingredients nationally, a number of items in the canteen will go up in price from September. However, our caterers, ABM, have managed to retain the same Meal Deal price of £2.60. The new menu tariff will be published on our website during the summer in readiness for September.

Support in the Summer

We know that the rising cost of living will place a great burden on many families, especially those on low incomes and where children may be entitled to free school meals. Many high street restaurants and supermarkets are supporting families throughout the summer with free or discounted food.

See the graphic below for more details.