

WEEK 1 - Friday 9 September 2022

The words that I had intended to share with you today about our school community have obviously been overtaken by the events which played out yesterday culminating in the sad news of the death of HM The Queen.

This is a historic moment in our country's history and we will all remember where we were when we heard the news that the monarch had died. I was sitting in my lounge watching the rolling coverage of what was then being reported as concerns about her health, when suddenly the screen changed and the BBC presenter announced that she had died. Immediately I called my children to sit with me and to watch the TV, telling them that this was a moment in history that they need to experience and reflect on.

And this has been our message to the students this morning. Everyone will deal with this period in their own way; many adults and children will be very upset for their own reasons whilst others will mark it in a less emotive way. Most though are curious as to what is happening and the impact they may see on the faces and words of their parents and grandparents. It is not for us to tell anyone how to behave, whether or not to grieve or mourn, but we have a duty at times of high historic significance to explain to our children and to encourage them to reflect on the world around them.

This morning, we shared a video presentation in tutor period this morning which summarises the late Queen's long life of service and outlines what will happen next in terms of the continuity of the monarchy. We have also spoken to students about the desire to respect the moment and to respect others who may be especially affected, including parents, grandparents, elderly neighbours.

Around the school, all of our TV displays are showing a tribute to the Queen and we will also be reducing our activities next week in line with most other public organisations. The Year 10 Parents Information evening, scheduled for Thursday 15 September, has been cancelled and I will contact you with a new date very shortly. You will also see fewer social media posts from the school but we will still keep in touch with urgent messages via email.

Currently, we do not know any more than you do about arrangements for the remainder of the period of mourning. As further information emerges, I will be on touch.

Although the week has ended with great sadness, it has been a hugely successful return to school for students. Year 7 and 11 returned smoothly on Tuesday and by Wednesday, all students were back, and we had more students and staff on our school site than at any other time in our history. Over 1400 students are now educated on our Heads Lane site each day and the plans we put in place in terms of staffing and rooming worked well to ensure that all our young people were able to get straight back into their learning. It was an immense pleasure to stand at the school gate this week and see so many smartly dressed and enthusiastic young people of all ages. I thank you genuinely for your support with this since the standards of uniform and preparation are incredible.

We have seen notable change to our ICT systems this summer which is still causing us some issues with regards to communication. Please bear with us whilst our TCAT ICT team fix these issues. I will write to you again shortly with more information about how we will be communicating with you throughout the year.

One of the improvements we have made to the school site is a timeline display in the school which illustrates the history of our school. It is a beautiful display which underlines the rock-solid foundations on which our school has developed over many years. I hope – in time – you will all have the chance to see it, especially those of you that studied here. This morning, as I walked past it, I was

reminded that our school first opened (on Boothferry Road) in 1927 – one year after our late Queen was born. What a life, what a history.

Have a lovely, and reflective, weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 2 - Friday 16 September 2022

As our school has grown in recent years, this has naturally had a positive impact on the school budget. Most important is the now-stable nature of our student body which means that our income is reasonably predictable allowing us to make long-term decisions about staffing and curriculum. On the other side of the ledger – expenditure – things have recently been anything but predictable.

School income is based on a number of factors but the main one is the number of students on roll. Since we know how many students we have in school, we therefore have a general idea of what our income will be and, each Spring, we find out what the funding per student will be and we then plan and set our budget accordingly. It sounds straightforward. Until we are hit with unexpected costs.

Bizarrely, after telling us how much money we will receive, the Government then set to deciding whether teachers should get a pay rise and how much it will be. This information is shared with us in July. You would hope – wouldn't you – that the income announced in Spring was calculated to cover the pay rise but no, it isn't. In most years, it doesn't matter too much as the pay award is usually 1-2% and we just factor that in when setting our budgets. But this year, given the big increase in inflation, schools and Trusts had no idea what the Government would decide to award teachers. In the event, they decided on an average of 5% (still half the rate of inflation so effectively a pay cut) and told us that it would have to come from our existing budgets. Bear in mind that we only discovered this a week before we broke for the summer holidays with our budgets already well set for the upcoming year and also that 5% of our teaching staff budget amounts to several hundred thousand pounds and it is fair to say that our budget has been turned upside down.

On top of this, the rising energy bills have already added huge pressure to our costs and, given the paralysis in Government this summer, we still do not know what our likely energy costs are going to be. This is the situation facing schools at the moment – acute financial problems with no clear sense of direction from the Department for Education, which is currently onto its fourth Secretary of State this year. Thankfully, like most schools, we are part of a Multi-Academy Trust and, because we have managed our budget well over the years, we have financial reserves and a shared risk across our schools. The immediate hit from these rising concerns will be accommodated from these reserves but that is not the end of the story. The reserves ought to be used to improve school facilities for the benefit of students; sadly, our ability to do that is much diminished as a result of these huge financial hits.

As I stated at the outset, our relatively secure position is due to our size, stability and recent growth. But we do not take that for granted and will be pulling out all the stops again this year to ensure that as many people as possible know about our school in the hope that they will choose it for their child. Therefore, our Year 5 / 6 Open Evening will be held in full for the first time since the start of the Pandemic. On Thursday 29 September we will be throwing open our doors and letting prospective students and their families have a look around the school, meet the staff and hear from senior leaders about the great work that our staff do. If you are the parent of a child who will be applying,

or considering applying, to Hessle High School, or if you know someone who is, please spread the word and come along. We look forward to seeing you.

Finally, it will be a sombre weekend culminating with the late Queen's funeral on Monday. A reminder that the school is closed on Monday as part of the national Bank Holiday and so we will welcome students back to school on Tuesday morning.

Have a lovely weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 3 - Friday 23 September 2022

As I walked around the site at lunchtime, a number of colleagues asked me how I planned to spend my weekend. Did I have much planned? Where to start?

Tonight I will take my son down to his cricket club for a net session and then, at 9am in morning, he has a tennis lesson which usually leaves me kicking my heels or going for a run around Hull City Centre for an hour and or so. Later in the afternoon, I'll be driving him up to Driffield for a floodlit cricket match which will mean us getting home around 9pm. And then, on Sunday morning, his weekly football match for Hessle Sporting Asteroids sees us travelling up to Seamer, just outside of Scarborough. That is an especially busy weekend, and I am glad to do it but it often leaves me wondering how lucky he is to be able to enjoy such a range of sports and experiences.

When I was his age, my parents couldn't drive and so my ability to take part in clubs and sports was limited by the distance I could walk or travel on my bike. It didn't stop me from playing sports but I was never fortunate enough to feel the sense of community that you can gain from being part of a club, especially one that is away from school. I know that this is the case for many of our students in school, where parents must work over the weekend or can't afford the transport to ferry children around and about. And I know that the children will potentially miss out on some life-changing opportunities as a result. The 'Circle of Participation' is a long-established educational model that explains the value to a child of positive and healthy interactions with others outside of the family and school.

As a school, by definition, we cannot do much to help young people participate in community clubs but we can certainly do our best to widen their participation in sports, arts and other subjects within school and this is a role that will be taken up this year by Mr Leckenby. Many of you will know Mr Leckenby as a teacher and pastoral leader at Hessle for many years and, this year, he has been seconded to the Senior Leadership Team to take a strategic lead of our Extra-Curricular Activities. During Covid, most of these clubs stopped and it has taken some effort to get them restarted. We also want to ensure that we are as inclusive as possible with these and do as much as we can to support students who might otherwise find it difficult to attend due to transport problems or responsibilities they have to their families. It makes me both sad and proud to learn how many of our young people are already carers for members of their own families. Still children themselves, many of them rush home from school to look after siblings, parents or grandparents and this can often prevent them from joining after school activities. Working with them, and families, we want to open up more options and enable them to enjoy the benefits of sports, drama, music or whatever might interest them after school.

Next week sees another visit to the school of the BBC cameras as they have asked us to join in with their 'Share Your Story' project to celebrate 100 years of the BBC. A number of students will participate in year group assemblies and will be joined by a well-known local celebrity who will be coming into school (I'm sorry but I'm not allowed to say who it is!). Look out on the news and social media for coverage of this event.

Finally, I thank you for your support this term and your patience as we continue to resolve a number of ICT issues that have affected our communication in some areas. This has been caused by us aligning our ICT systems with the other schools in our Trust and, once fully resolved, will hopefully streamline a lot of what we do across the Trust and in schools. As ever with ICT, I am always the least smart person in the room when this is being discussed but I am told progress is being made!

Whatever you are doing this weekend, enjoy what remains of the warm weather and take care.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 4 - Friday 30 September 2022

Last night, after our Year 5/6 Open Evening, I wrote this to the staff:

What a night! There are times when we are reminded just what an important role we play in our community and tonight was one of them. For those of you that have not experienced an Open Evening before, we are usually thrilled with around 200 families turning up. But tonight, colleagues, we had 402 families sign in. 402!!! And, as parents left, everyone I spoke to said that they had been blown away by the staff - by you all. In many, many cases, their visit tonight had changed their view of where they would be applying. Such is the spirit that you created tonight.

I think you can tell, from those words, how proud I was to be the Headteacher of Hessle High School last night but today I would also like to thank you all, as parents and carers. It sounds very twee to talk about a 'school family' but there is no doubt that a good school cannot function without the support (and challenge) of an engaged parental community. "It takes a village to raise a child" is an ancient proverb and it is true. The reason why so many parents and children came last night is because of the strong reputation that has been built up by my staff but also by the conduct of the students and the conversations that take place in the community amongst families. And it is you that help us to improve, through your support and, occasionally, through your challenge when we get things wrong and your feedback on how a decision has played out in your family. Working together, we improve your local school and the effectiveness of that was seen last night with so many families wishing to send their child to Hessle High School. Thank you.

This week also marks the halfway point of the half term and we have now been back to school for a month. There is a real rhythm to the school year and, at this time, we can begin to sense that the darker, colder months are ahead. The winter months do become more difficult in school as students huddle together in the canteen rather than going onto the field and playgrounds; absence creeps up as staff and students pick up seasonal bugs and there is always the unpredictability of Hull Fair which causes the students to become a bit more excitable, as you can imagine. So, at this time we are heavily focussed on really embedding our routines and making sure that students can focus on their work and learning. We will also remind students that, from half term, we will switch to our winter timetable which reduces the length of lunchtime by five minutes and means that students also leave school five minutes earlier. This was introduced last year and will again be in place until February half term.

Finally, we are very interested to know your views on how we hold parents' evenings this year. Over the last two years we have gone online and many parents have expressed a preference for this to continue; however, we have also heard from an equal number of parents who would prefer to go back to in-person meetings. We are not going to please everyone on this one but we would really appreciate your views if you could share them via this survey.

Whatever you may be doing this weekend, I hope it is relaxing and enjoyable.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 5 - Friday 7 October 2022

It is over two years now since we changed the pastoral system in school to reflect a year-group system. There were several reasons for this which I have explained in previous blogs but the main one reason was to enable us to effectively tailor our personal development and tutor programme to the specific needs of students that are the same age. It also allows our pastoral leaders to better support groups of students through the tumultuous adolescent years when they fall in and out of friendship groups and where peer dispute assume enormous proportions. A Head of Year, and his/her Assistant, can metaphorically hold the hands of the students as they go through this in a way that our previous House Leaders could not. I am delighted with the changes we made two years ago and believe that we will continue to see the benefits of this change for a few years yet as tutors and leaders build their relationships.

That said, we are still committed to our House system but it has evolved into something quite different to the year-group pastoral system. Heads of House are the figureheads for the students in each of our four Houses, which is populated by students from Years 7 to 11. Their work is around celebrating the very great work that is done every day by students whether it be in lessons, in clubs, in the community or sport. Of course their role reaches its peak at Sports Day in the summer but throughout the year, they hold Assemblies, run charity events and celebrate the accumulation of House Points by their students. Due to a change in role, two of our House Leaders from last year, Mr Compton and Mr Sellers, have stepped aside this year but I am delighted that they have been replaced by two other equally dedicated members of staff. Miss Kemp is a teacher of Languages and she will now head up Ariel House whilst Mr Kay (English) will take over at Orlando. You will hear more about the activities they are planning for their students in due course.

This has been a tricky week in school with some inclement weather and also a number of staff absences, particularly in the school canteen. As you know, the catering in school is provided by ABM Catering who also employ the canteen cooks and servers. Like many employers, they have struggled with recruitment for a while now and this was made worse with a spate of absence this week which has forced them to reduce the catering provision slightly with the outside snack shack being closed for much of the week. Students can still get a range of hot and cold food inside and they are always encouraged to speak to a member of staff if they are struggling to get served or find an item that they want in their area, that we can find it elsewhere. In the meantime, thank you for your support and cooperation as we support ABM with their staffing difficulties. Please see the vacancies page of our website should you know anyone who may be interested in working at Hessle High School.

On Thursday, we will be holding our Year 11 Parents Information Evening. For those that have not attended one of these before, this is not the event where you meet subject teachers to discuss your child's progress; instead, it is an opportunity to hear from senior and pastoral leaders about the year

ahead facing students in Year 11 and the package of support that is available to them. There is never a more important time for parents and carers to be fully engaged with their child's education than in Year 11 – this is the year in which many, many important choices are made amidst the pressure cooker environment of an exam year. Students cannot get through this on their own – they need you and they need us as a close partnership. The event on Thursday will share more information of how we can work together to that end.

Finally, it is pouring down again – it seems to be the case every Friday now. Hopefully the sun will return but this really does look like 'Hull Fair Weather'. Whether you are going to the Fair or not, have an enjoyable weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 6 - Friday 14 October 2022

I write this as my phone pings with the dramatic news of two double sackings taking place within minutes of one another.

First, my Hull FC-supporting pals are messaging to alert me to the fact that our star player Jake Connor has been released from his contract. And then, my news alerts drop in with the equally shocking news that the Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng has been sacked. Rumours of a swap deal quickly circulate as Tony Smith and Liz Truss prepare to announce replacements.

In all seriousness, neither piece of news is hugely surprising. For those of you that follow Hull FC, it was always likely that the new coach, Smith – a strict disciplinarian – would not fancy working with a maverick individual such as Connor. While Kwarteng effectively wrote his own resignation letter in the form of the mini-budget last month. But it got me thinking about the longevity of roles that politicians hold and how it compares to schools. Kwarteng has been Chancellor for a month or so, having replaced Nadhim Zahawi who himself only replaced Rishi Sunak in July. In fact, the next incumbent at the Treasury will be the sixth since George Osborne resigned in 2016! But that is stability compared to the roll call of Education Secretaries – seven in four years, and four this year alone!

Earlier this week I spoke to a group of parents about the benefit of staffing stability in school and how teaching and learning improves through incremental improvements made by people who gradually find better ways to do their jobs over time. This can be accelerated when those colleagues work in a supportive and safe environment. As Headteacher, that is the culture I strive to create, and I am fortunate that most of my staff wish to pursue their medium to long term future at Hessle and therefore your children benefit from their growing expertise. I cannot imagine the chaos that would be unleashed if I had got through seven Heads of English, say, in four years. The staff would not know what was going on and the students would be much the worse off.

Likewise, if I had appointed someone to a post as important as Chancellor (Deputy Head for example) and then sacked them a month later, you would rightly be questioning my judgement. Thankfully, we do not work in the turbulent world of politics but there are still some schools, under incredible external and financial pressures, that do not enjoy the stability that we do at Hessle, and I do not take that for granted.

A reminder that next week, students finish school on Thursday as the following day (Friday 21 October) is a calendared Staff Training Day. Students will then break for half term and return to school on Monday 31 October.

Finally, returning to my rugby league theme, tomorrow sees the start of the World Cup and my son and I are seeking to take in the first two games, played in Newcastle and Leeds. He has planned the itinerary and we have an early start to catch the train up to the North East in the morning to watch England play Samoa, followed by a teatime dash down to Leeds for the evening game between Australia and Fiji. He promises me we can make it and we can't wait. Whatever you are doing this weekend, have a good one.

Thanks for your support

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 7 - Thursday 20 October 2022

End of Half Term Blog

Today marks the end of the first half term of the year and I know that staff and students are very much ready for a break. Term-time in schools is a bit like dog-years; it may only be seven calendar weeks since we returned to school but it feels like seven months in 'school time'. During that time, students have settled into their new classes, got to know their new teachers and, in the case of Year 7, have learned their way around their new school. New friends will have been made, new topics learned, and perhaps new hobbies and interests kindled. As a school, we have worked hard to adjust to having more students on our site that at any time in our 95-year history and I delighted to report that not only have students settled in well but they have been a credit to their families both in their behaviour and their attitude to work. I have also been incredibly impressed with the standards of uniform this term and I thank you sincerely for your support with that.

I have often told you about the variety I experience in my role and this week has been no different. To give you a flavour of my week, let me tell you about Wednesday. The day started with a meeting of our Senior Leadership Team; during this 15-minute slot, we check on any staff absences and make sure we have lessons and duty points covered. Then we are out on gate duty making sure that students, staff, parents and buses can all come and go safely. Over 1500 individuals and many vehicles arrive in the 20-30 minutes before school starts and so this is a big undertaking for our staff. If you have ever been on site at this time, you will see us in our blue coats, radios in hand, coordinating the movement and checking all is in order. Due to a couple of staff absences, I made my way to the Year 7 area to support Mrs Pinkney and it was lovely to see our youngest students behaving so well and demonstrating such eagerness to start their learning.

From here, I nipped back to my office to pick up my resources and then it was over to Tranby House to teach my Year 13 Business group. They are learning about Interest Rates, Exchange Rates and the UK Economy at the moment and there could not be a more relevant topic right now. My class is made up of Hessle and Wolfreton students and they are really interested in learning more about the economy. I teach them for two hours on a Wednesday with a one-hour break in between and it is the highlight of my week.

In between lessons, I met with Trust colleagues and a team of local architects to discuss options for a possible expansion of the site to accommodate the predicted rise in numbers in our Sixth Form. This

is an incredibly exciting possibility and, although I am not getting my hopes up too early, it would be great to see development of the site in the years to come. After my second lesson, it was straight onto the field for Year 7 lunch duty and then, back-to-back, into the canteen to supervise the second lunch period. Once the students had been escorted into lessons, I then met with Neil Leckenby, our Head of Year 10, who has been seconded onto our leadership team for the year. This is a really positive initiative and I wanted to learn from him how he felt it was going and whether it was giving him the opportunity to learn and develop that we intended. It is always a privilege to talk to colleagues about their career ambitions and especially with Mr Leckenby who has years of experience and a deep passion for Hesse High School. After checking a few emails, it was back on duty to ensure the students left the site safely and to supervise the school buses.

Wednesday is our Senior Leadership Team meeting night and this week I had arranged for a professional coach to do some training with the team, which also included the leaders from Penshurst Primary School, which you will know is part of our through-school Academy. Although the leadership team is fairly stable, there has been a few new faces added to it this year and so I wanted Kris Bush to challenge our thinking and to help us agree some key principles about how we will work well as a team, for the benefit of our staff and students. Over the next two hours, we explored how we would do this, and got to know each other a little better too.

By 6pm, another day had come to an end and it was time to go home. I've always had a keen interest in politics but I have become obsessed in recent months, and so I was immediately onto twitter and the TV news, intrigued to know about the latest comings and goings in the cabinet. Following that, I joined my son to watch some of the Rugby League World Cup game whilst planning our next trip to watch some games live. Those of you that read last week's blog will know that we managed to take in the first two games, in Newcastle and then in Leeds, and I'm delighted to say that the journey went to plan, and we made it to both games. It was a brilliant day, filled with lots of great experiences, and a real chance for Dylan and I to spend lots of time together, without distraction.

Next week is half term and I hope you and your families can spend some quality time together. There are no great plans on the horizon in the Groak household; so far, my plan for the week consists of mundane activities such as updating my meter readings, getting my glasses repaired and updating the School Development Plan. Ah, the joy!

Whatever you are doing, have a great week and thank you as ever for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 8 - Friday 4 November 2022

This weekend is the second Rugby League World Cup Double Header in the Groak household. We will be setting off for Wigan in the morning to see England play Papua New Guinea in the Quarter-Final of the tournament and hopefully arriving early enough to watch at least some of the England v Canada Women's game, which precedes it. After those matches are over, it will be straight back to Hull to see New Zealand play against Fiji in another of the Men's Quarter Finals. A long, but enjoyable day with some good, close games and hopefully an England victory.

My son and I have really got into this World Cup and have enjoyed watching many of the smaller nations and the other competitions as well. I especially enjoyed the Wheelchair Rugby League match yesterday between England and Australia. Having never seen this version of the sport before, I

wasn't sure what to expect but I was blown away by the skill and physicality of the game. It takes some rare courage to play sport with any form of disability and to launch yourself into physical contact with another athlete in a wheelchair is brave beyond belief. From the chat on social media, it seemed like many new fans were found during last night's game, especially with it being shown live on BBC2. If you haven't yet watched any of the Rugby League World Cup tournaments, I would strongly urge you to do so; I have always loved the sport for its traditions and its values. There is nothing as humbling and wholesome as a rugby league crowd and I shall enjoy every minute of my time in Wigan and Hull tomorrow.

Last night saw our first Progress Evening of the year, this time for Year 10 Parents and Carers. It is nearly three years since we have hosted an in-person event and I know that we were a little rusty with a few mishaps along the way. For the majority, the event went smoothly but I know that a few parents had issues with making appointments or finding that they were not the same as our staff. We have carried out a debrief today and have identified the mix of human and system errors that were the cause. Thank you for bearing with us and please accept my apologies if you were inconvenienced. Despite that, it was fantastic to see so many parents back in school engaged in discussions with teaching staff. I often say that "It takes a village to raise a child" and your support is invaluable to us in trying to secure the best education for your child. Thanks for your support and it was great to see you.

The next Progress Evening is for Year 7 and I will write to you shortly with details of how you can book appointments for this one.

Finally, I will finish with a short word about the Shaping Positive Futures Conference which took place on the final day of the last half term. As a member school of The Consortium Academy Trust, one of the benefits of this is the ability to collaborate on staff training and development and this conference was not only the biggest we have organised but also by far and away the best. Over 800 school staff were split over three sites (including Hessle) and colleagues were able to choose from a range of training workshops relevant to their role. I was based at Hessle as host of the Trust support staff and it was a real pleasure to see so many people learning, networking and just chatting about how they can do their jobs even better. And they do this for your children. It really was a privilege to see it and discussions have already begun about how we can do it all again, bigger and better, next year. Watch this space.

So that brings an end to the first week of the new half term. Thank you once again for your support and for the kind words shared with staff last evening, and throughout the week. Those really are cherished.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 9 - Friday 11 November 2022

I have written in this blog several times about the growth in our numbers on roll, which has seen a 38% increase since 2017. This means that all year groups, from Year 7 to 11, are just about full at 250 students in each group. The next stage of our growth will come over the next two years as those students reach the age at which they can apply for our Sixth Form College. Applications are currently coming in and I would urge anyone whose child is considering our sixth form to get this application in as soon as possible. This then prompts an interview with our Director of Sixth Form, Steven

Jarman, who will not only consider the students for our Sixth form but will also signpost alternatives where appropriate.

Each year, we typically recruit around 40-42% of our Year 11 students into Sixth Form – always following the principle of ‘right student, right course’. In recent years, with year groups of approximately 180 students in Year 11, this has translated into around 70-80 in each of the Sixth Form year groups. From next year, with year groups of 250, this will, of course, mean more students in our Sixth Form. Firstly, this secures the viability of a number of subjects which may not be economical to run at Hessle because of low numbers. The more students we have in the school, the more likely that these subjects will attract numbers of students that make them viable. And, secondly, it opens up opportunities for physical expansion too.

Today, and over the past several weeks, I have spent a great deal of time working with Trust colleagues to put together a detailed bid for funding through the Department of Education’s Post-16 Capacity Fund. This provides capital funding for projects that will meet the anticipated need for more Post-16 places in areas where there is a proven demographic need which, in our area, there clearly is.

This is a very exciting prospect and the provisional plans would mean a significant extension to our Sixth Form College with great facilities for our future students. Of course, like any funding bid there is no guarantee that it will be successful but you have to be ‘in it, to win it’ and so the time invested so far has been worth doing and I am hugely grateful to the support that we have received from our Trust with this bid to date and for their committed support to alternative plans if we are unsuccessful in this specific bid. Of course, I will keep you informed as to the progress of this, in the coming weeks and months.

Finally, this week we have been marking the build-up to Remembrance Day on Sunday with the selling and wearing of Poppies throughout the school and, earlier today, we marked this with the 2-minute silence at 11am. It is at times such as these where we really see the best of our school community and it was humbling to see so many of our students stopped in their tracks when the 11am moment came along and standing respectfully in remembrance of those who made the ultimate sacrifice over many conflicts to protect us. It made me very proud and I am sure you feel equally proud of your young person when they participate in events such as these.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

Footnote:

I have pleasure in detailing below information from Hessle Scout Group who have contacted us to help them promote their group to the learners at the Hessle Academy. There are spaces available in their Scout section, for young people age 10 years plus. Please contact them directly for further information.

Being a Scout is all about discovering the world, mastering the skills that'll help you through life, and trying things you'd never get the chance to do at home. If you are aged 10 to 14, get in touch to start your adventure. Email: gsl@hesslescoutgroup.co.uk



WEEK 10 - Friday 18 November 2022

I am delighted that this week we have successfully appointed a new Attendance Manager to oversee attendance across our 3-19 Academy. This gap since the start of September has been sorely felt and Mrs Claire Kibart, who is an internal appointment and so will start the move into the role immediately, is a highly skilled and professional colleague who will immediately begin to have an impact.

The lack of this role for such a period of time has caused a number of problems for us. The role has two main functions; firstly, each day, it is necessary for us to have an accurate picture of who is in school and who is not and this is checked against the messages we receive from parents notifying us of student absence. If there are still students absent for which we do not have information, we begin to communicate with parents/carers. This must happen quickly to ensure that the whereabouts of students is known. In the absence of the attendance manager, this task is crucial and so still needed to be done for safeguarding reasons. Extra resource was committed to enable this to take place.

The second part of the role is to administer requests for absence and to implement attendance support plans for those with attendance concerns and problems. Whilst important, this is not as critical as the first part of the role and this is the area which we have not been able to fulfil to the standard we would normally expect. If you have been affected by any delays in this regard, please accept my apologies and I hope you recognise our need to prioritise the daily checking of attendance. With the appointment of Mrs Kibart, I am confident that we will soon be back up to full speed. Many thanks for your support.

A recent survey showed that up to one million people have left the UK labour force since the start of the pandemic. Some of these were foreign workers, continuing the post-Brexit exodus, but many were also UK citizens unable to work due to sickness or making a deliberate choice to retire early. This has had a huge impact on the ability of some organisations to fill certain roles, especially those in hospitality, administration. We are no different and, although we are fully staffed with teachers, we have a number of support staff vacancies that are proving very difficult to fill. The smaller supply of labour and the cost-of-living crisis have conspired to make it so.

Nevertheless, working in a school cannot be beaten for stimulation and a sense of purpose. And, if you are a parent, the term time working pattern is quite attractive too. If you are interested in working in schools, or know anyone else who may be, please check out the website for vacancies.

Yesterday evening was the latest Progress Evening, this time for one half of the Year 7 cohort and it was a real success. You may wonder what criteria we use to measure the success of such an event? Well, firstly, the proportion of parents/carers attending was 78% - a figure which even exceeds attendance pre-Pandemic. Of course, we want to see the families of all students but we recognise that this isn't always possible so to see so many was wonderful. Secondly, the event ran very close to time. Appointments can be made between 3.30 to 6pm, with 30 minutes 'run-on' time to allow for those extra conversations that are slightly delayed or for parents/carers to speak to senior staff. The final appointment ended at 6.35pm which, when you consider some events in previous years have still been going at midnight (not really, although it sometimes felt like it! - 7pm is more accurate), well, we were pleased with that. And staff certainly were. Finally, the feedback from visitors was very positive and there was a lovely atmosphere in the room during the night. If you have any feedback to share with this on this event, or any other, please do so, as we are always looking for ways to improve these events for your benefit.

In spite of the high turnout, the reason we managed to complete broadly on time was because we split the Year 7 event into two evenings. And that will be a model for future year groups too.

So, a big 'thank you' for your support with that and, if you are attending the second half of the event next Thursday (24 November) then we look forward to seeing you there.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 11 - Friday 25 November 2022

I knew, when I first became Headteacher back in 2018, that decision-making was going to be a key part of the job. What I didn't realise was the range of decisions I would need to make; the complexity, the gravity and, in some cases, the banality.

One typical morning went something like this....

"Vince, you've got a meeting with Colleague X today, you need to make a decision on their application to work part-time."

"Colleague Y wants to run a non-uniform day for charity next month but Colleague Z is worried that we only did one last month. What do you think?"

"There's been a major safeguarding disclosure. We need to decide whether to report it to the police."

"A tree was damaged in the wind last night. The groundsmen are saying he can make it safe for £200 but really the whole tree should come down, and that's £800. What do you want to do?"

"It's parents evening next Thursday. The catering manager wants to know if you want her to buy biscuits in or make cakes."

By lunchtime, I was exhausted and just hoped I had made the right decisions. Especially about the biscuits.

After a while, I learned a few things. Namely:

Never rush a decision. Especially when it will impact on the welfare of someone else – a student, colleague or parent

Try to make a collective decision. Two brains, or ideally five or six, are always better than one.

Once a decision is made, let it go. If it turns out to have been a bad decision, then certainly reflect on why you chose the wrong option, but don't dwell on it. It will only cloud the next decision you have to make.

The reason for that last point is because most decisions are finely balanced and will inevitably upset or disappoint as many people as they please. In other words, you can't please everyone.

An example of this came a few weeks ago when we were debating whether to show the England v Iran football match last Monday. In the scheme of things, it is not the biggest decision we have to make but we wanted to get it right.

Our first thoughts were that we probably would collapse the timetable and allow students to watch the game in their tutor groups. We considered having a 'cultural afternoon' with a range of activities going on, whilst the game was on the screens for those that wanted to watch it.

We knew that, if we took this decision, some students would be delighted, whilst others would be disappointed at missing their lessons. We were also aware that boredom could kick in quite early and even those that wanted to watch the football might not sustain their interest all afternoon and would then need to be occupied and engaged. In splitting the student's opinion, we were also likely to divide opinion amongst parents. And staff. We therefore decided not to make an immediate decision and to gauge the level of interest in the game over the coming days.

After a week or so, we discussed it again as part of our regular Senior Leadership Team meetings. In the meantime, we had chatted to staff and students and the general feeling was that there was not a huge surge of interest in the game. In fact, some students told us they would not be watching the World Cup in Qatar on moral grounds. I also took two calls from parents. One asked if we were showing the game and told me that they didn't think we should. Another said it would be 'shameful' if we didn't.

In the end, we decided not to show it. At the end of the day, we are a school and we only disrupt normal lessons when there is an overwhelming reason to do so and England v Iran in an early group game did not feel like an event that was going to 'stop the nation in its tracks'.

Frustratingly, I also received a few more messages from parents, expressing their disappointment that we didn't show the game. I always welcome feedback but it was regrettable that more than one message did not seem to appreciate that there might have been an alternative opinion and that ultimately, we were never going to please everyone.

It later turned out that, according to a survey, only 38% of schools in England showed the game that afternoon. And, in our school, there was obviously a fair amount of interest, but students managed to keep up with events in Qatar whilst also staying in lessons and learning.

In the end, then, I think we made the right decision. But we don't always get it right. A decision we got wrong this year was not to prepare well enough for our Year 10 Progress evening a few weeks

ago. We had decided to hold the event in person but I overlooked the fact that it had been three years since we had held such an event and we were a bit rusty. A few mistakes were made in the planning for that which inconvenienced a number of parents in terms of appointments times. On reflection, that could have been avoided with a bit more foresight. As a result, we stepped up our planning for the Year 7 events last week and this and, I'm pleased that these have both gone off much more smoothly.

It is a huge privilege to be responsible for such a range of decision making in a school and I do not take decisions lightly, even around cake or biscuits! I am indebted to my senior team, who I involve in all major decision making, and who are not afraid to tell me when I am about to make a bad decision. As a team, I like to think that we get many more things right than we get wrong.

Finally, on the subject of the World Cup, I am looking forward to watching the England game tonight. You know that I am more of a rugby league fan than a football fan but my son is utterly hooked on the sport and this year's World Cup. His enthusiasm reminds me of myself. My first real memory of a World Cup was in 1978 in Argentina and it consumed all of my attention for the entire month. Even though England weren't in it and I followed Scotland instead! I still remember the Archie Gemmill wonder goal against the Dutch and the ticker-tape reception when the Argentines played. Brilliant. So I will enjoy watching Dylan completing his wallchart and going nuts over Harry Kane and Raheem Sterling and I am sure I will enjoy the game too.

Whatever you are planning to do, whether it is watching the football or avoiding it, have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 12 - Friday 2 December 2022

There is nothing more likely to instil anxiety and weary trepidation than an email from my child's school stating, 'Next Thursday is "Dress-Up as a Pirate Day". We are encouraging children to wear a costume to celebrate etc etc.'

I shouldn't grumble because it will be my wife who will then go onto Amazon in search of a suitable costume (someone is making an absolute fortune out of school theme days, by the way) and then send me a link asking me to buy it (I am the one with the Amazon Prime Account). A few days later, our eight year old daughter will then appear dressed up as a pirate/fairy/gangster asking me 'how do I look?'. It is all good fun for the children but a headache for parents and I know that it can cause real anxiety and unwanted stress for many families. And, believe me, there are plenty of times when we decide that enough is enough, or we don't have the time.

At Hesse High, we seek to keep non-uniform days to an absolute minimum. I have written many times about why we insist on high standards of uniform and what happened when my old school, Sir Henry Cooper, chose to abolish uniform in the mid-eighties (it was great for 2-3 days and then became a nightmare of choosing what to wear leading to bullying and stress for hundreds of kids). Any day that requires our students to wear anything other than their uniform has the potential to create anxiety, especially in homes where families might be going through a tough time financially. On the other hand, we don't want to be the 'fun police' either so it becomes a difficult balancing act.

What we try to do is take away any element of compulsion or pressure for students, and families, to go out and purchase an item of clothing specifically or to feel compelled to make a donation to a

charity. Things like 'Odd Socks Day' are a fun way to raise awareness of an issue without imposing any costs on families.

Next week is 'Christmas Jumper Day' - a national 'event' now to raise funds and awareness for the Save The Children fund. Instead, we have decided to hold our own version on the final day of term (16 December) when students will be invited to wear 'Christmas Items'. This doesn't need to be a jumper but could be a hat, scarf, accessory or even reindeer ears. Instead of collecting money on the day, we will send a link to the Save the Children website and parents/carers can – if they wish – make a donation to the charity. This is the approach we try to take with these events and I hope parents/carers understand why.

And don't forget that, on the final day of term, school closes at 1.45pm and early buses have been arranged. School reopens for students on Wednesday 4 January 2023.

So there are only two weeks left of term and the Christmas build-up has certainly begun. Tonight I will be at the Hessle Christmas Lights Switch On, watching some of our children from Hessle and Penshurst performing but hopefully seeing some of you down there. And then tomorrow, our tree goes up at home and I allow the first Christmas song to be played in the Groak house!

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 13 - Friday 9 December 2022

Like the rest of the country, I am looking forward to watching the England football team in action tomorrow night against France. This year's tournament has given me the opportunity to talk to a number of our students about some of my earlier World Cup memories. It definitely ages me when some of the students tell me that their first world cup memory was 2014, or in some cases, 2018! And then I tell them that the 1978 World Cup was the first one I remember!

I am always delighted to talk to students who have an interest in sport, as I feel it has so much to offer young people, way beyond the health benefits of regular exercise. Being part of a sporting team is a great feeling and I get great joy from watching our school teams, or my own son's football and cricket teams, celebrating their successes together. Currently, my son's football team – Hessle Sporting Asteroids – have been doing it tough. Several key players left the team and, as they moved into the Under 13 age group, they struggled to cope with playing on a full-sized pitch. A few of his teammates are also students here at Hessle and so I have great fondness for the team and love watching the range of emotions they go through. There have been times this season when my son has been close to tears as we have driven home from yet another heavy defeat. No doubt, he was questioning whether it was worth putting himself through such dejection. But this became a great opportunity for us to talk about resilience, and about talking the rough with the smooth. I reminded him of how good it feels when his team win and how much satisfaction he will get when he plays his part in turning things around.

"You've got two choices," I told him, "you can pack it in and have a lie-in on a Sunday morning. And always regret that you ended on a low. Or you can work even harder, be even more determined. And think about how good it will feel when you start winning again." I imagined myself as one of the great sporting coaches, as I delivered my pep talk! He just grunted.

Anyway, he did keep going and last Sunday they played against another team that had been struggling this season and they beat them, 3-1. The pleasure on their faces as the boys celebrated each goal and the final whistle was great to see and now they cannot wait to play their next game. Their enthusiasm rekindled with one bit of success.

I don't know much about the French football team but I know it will be difficult for the England boys tomorrow night but there certainly seems to be something in the air with English sporting teams this year. First it was the Lionesses winning the Euros in the summer, then the Men's cricketers winning the World T20 tournament followed by the England Wheelchair team winning the Rugby League World Cup last month. Who knows? Maybe it is coming home?

England's progress has thrown up a bit of a scheduling problem for us in school with the KS4/5 Awards Evening due to take place during England's potential Semi-Final fixture. Efforts to persuade FIFA to change the date of this have so far gone unheard and so the contingency plan is to bring forward our Awards Evening to Tuesday (6pm) should England qualify. I will of course, confirm this on Monday morning.

In the meantime, amongst Christmas shopping and football matches, try to stay warm and enjoy the weekend and thank you, as ever, for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 14 - Friday 16 December 2022

On Wednesday evening, I had the great privilege of speaking to students, staff and parents at our Annual KS4/5 Awards Evening. The theme I took for my short speech was the notion of leaving behind a legacy in whatever organisation you might be a part of.

I used the example of the All Blacks – the New Zealand Men's Rugby Union team. When someone is chosen to make their debut for the All Blacks, they are given an induction into what it means to be an 'All Black'. They are challenged to 'leave the jersey in a better place' and I used this statement to praise the students that had been nominated for awards for their success and endeavour over the past twelve months. Their success is intertwined with the success of the school. The large numbers of parents and carers who wish to send their child to our school is attributable in part to the example set by these students and because of the remarkable young men and women they have become. For that reason, they have left a legacy at our school and have 'left the jersey (or blazer!) in a better place.'

I am fascinated by the All Blacks' winning mentality and believe lots can be learned from their ethos. I also like the fact that all debutants receive a small black book when they turn up to camp for the first time. Inside is a photograph of the 1905 All Blacks – the very first incarnation of the team – as well as a picture of the 1924 Invincibles team, along with other great New Zealand teams, including those that had won the World Cup. After the first few pages though, the rest are blank and the player is once again challenged to write the rest of their story themselves. How long will the story be? How filled with success will it be? The message that anyone can write their own story, choosing to make great choices, choosing to dream big, is a hugely inspiring one. And certainly, one that will inspire a number of my assemblies this year, I'm sure!

I have written in this blog several times about our growth in student numbers over recent years and, as a consequence of this, we are currently exploring ways in which we can better accommodate

these students. We are not increasing our Pupil Admission Number (PAN) beyond its published figure; however, with our Trust, we are hoping to provide more physical building capacity for them. In order to do this, we must embark on a public consultation exercise which has begun this week. The link to the relevant information and how to participate in the consultation can be found on our website here.

And so we reach the end of the longest term of the year and undoubtedly the toughest. This morning whilst preparing my breakfast, I listened to the news headlines on the radio; it told of desperate tragedy in the channel, bitterly cold weather, rising interest rates and strikes. It seems that the news is unremittingly bleak at the moment, and it takes a lot of resilience to keep going through the day-to-day routines, especially at this time of the year. I know that our children will be influenced by this too and it falls to us as educators, parents and guardians to look after them through these difficult times. And give them some hope, for it does exist out there.

Maybe they can start with a two-week break from school and the chance to spend time with friends, family and Santa? And then a New Year and the arrival of Spring when everything is renewed and optimistic. This year the Groak family will be entertaining at home, with my in-laws coming up from Surrey to join us. We look forward to good company and some nice food and wine and I sincerely hope that you will also enjoy a warm and hospitable Christmas wherever you are.

Thank you for all your support during 2022 – we really do appreciate it.

From everyone at Hessle High School, have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 15 - Friday 6 January 2023

If someone had asked me – as the bells for New Year tolled – what I would wish for that would improve the standards of education and skills in this country in 2023, and beyond, I might have said...

More funding for children's mental health support

Greater attention to be given to teacher recruitment (targets for teacher recruitment haven't been hit for 10 years)

More per-pupil funding for schools to enable us to withstand rising energy costs and other inflationary pressures

The reform of Ofsted so that it becomes a genuine school improvement body rather than the cause of so much inequality in our system

The return of Sure Start centres to give all children the best start in life and to ensure they are school-ready when they reach compulsory school age

More childcare support to enable part time staff to go full time, if they wish to

With a bit more time, I may have come up with other ideas around curriculum, apprenticeships and skills but that would have done. For now.

What I emphatically would not have asked for would be to force students who stay in school or college up to the age of 18, to continue to study Maths? Sorry, what? Where did that come from?

Rishi Sunak's announcement this week - his first statement about education since he became PM – caught the headlines but, inevitably, as soon as he had said it, it was shot down for the preposterous half-baked idea that it is. There are so many reasons why it is just nonsense:

What if the child has already achieved high levels of competence in Maths (sufficient to manage a household budget, pay their taxes, hold down a decent job etc.) and then decides to follow a career in the Arts? What possible benefit could there be in them continuing to study Maths for another two years?

Who will teach them? Maths is already one of the subjects in which most schools struggle to recruit specialist teachers and the Government have even lowered their annual recruitment target from 2800 to 2040 because they got so fed up with missing their target! With teacher's pay falling in real terms and now faced with the prospect of having to teach some students who really do not want to be there, it's hard to see who is going to be teaching the 185,000 students a year who currently do not study Maths post-16.

What will they learn? The statement made it clear that it will not be algebra and equations but will be 'more practical' stuff such as finding a cheap deal on your energy bills. I think you need a magic wand to do that, rather than an extra maths qualification! But, seriously, who will decide what they will learn and how will that affect existing subjects and courses – which may then need more reform.

Improving maths skills is a laudable aim and there are many ways to do it. But making it compulsory to aged 18 is not one of them. Utter nonsense that is highly unlikely ever to see the light of day, thankfully.

Rant over.

As I write this, the sun is glinting off the windows of our Leisure Centre here on Heads Lane, the air is still and the sound of students enjoying their lunch break indicates that everyone has settled quickly into the new term. Thank you for your ongoing and unwavering support. Each time that students return to school, we know that it takes a big effort from parents to ensure that everything is in place for them to make a good start. Uniform checked, sized and updated; ParentPay topped up; alarm clocks set and books, bags and folders packed, ready to go. These are the things that enable the students to focus on what really matters; getting as much out of each day in school as they possible can.

Finally, can I urge you to activate your link to the Arbor App? This is the new, principal means by which we will communicate regular information from home to school. When reports are issued very soon, they will be sent to you via this app. If you have not already done so, please follow the instructions that can be found [here](#).

Thank you once again and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 16 - Friday 13 January 2023

Last term, we had the first ever Consortium Academy Trust Conference, which brought together all staff from across the Trust – over a thousand teaching and support staff in total. At this event, we were able to share good practice in a wide range of workshops spanning a variety of areas related to Teaching & Learning.

Following its success, the first ever TCAT Learner Conference took place at the University of Hull this week, and this event was also a huge success. This time, a small group of learners from each school replaced the staff in exciting workshops which focused on the themes of Diversity and Inclusion. A keynote speaker from The Art of Brilliance kicked off the day, before the learners moved into mixed-age, mixed-school groups for a variety of workshops. I had the privilege of walking around the event and observing some of the fantastic conversations between learners as young as five and as old as 18 as they collaborated on a number of projects. I am already looking forward to the next event and hope that more and more of our pupils will have the opportunity to attend during their education at Hessle High School.

Also this week, we have seen a real sense of urgency kicking into the work of Year 11 students. Revision classes have been taking place for many weeks with good, strong attendance across most subjects.

After today there are only 14 weeks left before the first sit-down-in-the-exam-hall GCSE Exams begin. In other words, Year 11 is well over half way through and, for most students, the penny had truly dropped that there needs to be real focus on preparing for the summer.

Parents sometimes ask ‘what can I do to make sure my child is fully prepared?’ and it can be a difficult time for parents. The priority is that they are in school so making sure your child is staying healthy and is in school every day, on time, prepared for learning is the very first thing that needs to happen. Beyond that, checking in at the end of every day, providing a comfortable, quiet place for home study and talking about the future and post-16 plans – these are the other things that parents and carers can do. You don’t need to understand the topics your child is studying but making sure they are in the right frame of mind is crucial. As is making sure they have balance in their lives and encouraging rest, exercise and time with friends and family.

As ever, we thank you for your support and are always here if you need it.

The first few weeks of term have been difficult for me personally and I have been at home for three days this week with Covid and trying to recover from a pretty nasty cold virus. I have managed to do some work from home but it was much better to be back in school yesterday and today and being able to see colleagues and students. I now know how prevalent these winter viruses are and I hope that you and your families can try to keep away from them – they're horrible.

Finally, a reminder that – two weeks today – is our Year 11 Mock Interview Day when only Year 11 students are in school with work set for all other students to work from home. This is a long-standing part of our school calendar to support Year 11 and more details can be found in letters that have also been sent home today.

However you are spending your weekend, I hope you can stay away from any lingering viruses and enjoy what looks to be some reasonable weather.

Thanks as ever for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 17 - Friday 20 January 2023

“Education is the silver bullet. Education is everything. We don’t need little changes, we need gigantic, monumental changes. Schools should be palaces. Competition for the best teachers should

be fierce; they should be making six figure salaries. Schools should be incredibly expensive for government and absolutely free of charge to its citizens, just like national defense.”

Sam Seaborn, *The West Wing*

I am a great fan of *The West Wing* and have been re-watching this American TV series recently. In one episode, the above quote was delivered in a passionate monologue about the state of schooling in America and I have thought about this several times whilst considering the state of education in England currently.

One of my friends texted me the other day; “Start at 9, finish at 3, with an hour’s playtime. Thirteen weeks holiday and yet teachers are still going on strike”. He does it to wind me up. Because he knows it's not true. He knows because of how many times I have to cancel going for a pint with him at the last minute because of work.

Every day, you trust us with your child - your most treasured possession - so you must trust us when we say that something has to change in our country’s schools, whether you support the upcoming strike or not. Pay is only part of the issue but something must change if we are to stop the huge turnover of talented people leaving teaching every year because of the combination of deteriorating pay and increased workload. As a Headteacher, I have some measure of control over the workload of my staff. But only some. I can’t do anything about the gradual breakdown in other public services which means that the only place that some families can come to for help with their child is their school.

On any typical day, my staff will look after the children in our care in ways that they couldn’t have possibly imagined when they first entered the profession. They will ensure that students have school uniform when they arrive in school in a morning, regularly loaning them items; sometimes they will take that uniform home and wash it for the child to wear again the next day; they’ll help them to get food because somehow they’ve arrived at school with neither food nor money on their account to pay for it; they’ll spend hours on the phone trying to access vital agency support for the child or their family; they’ll be the arbiter between family members that have fallen out, leaving the child in the middle; they’ll act like a detective to investigate a social media fall out and then as a referee to prevent a pile on by everyone else who thinks it's their business to get involved; they’ll calm a child down who is shouting in their face because – despite everything above that is being done to help them - that same child is frightened and anxious; they’ll reassure and comfort a teenager whose parent is unable to get vital healthcare because of the state the NHS is in. Then they’ll teach their subject with talent and unbelievable passion. And then they’ll come back the next day and do it all again.

Essentially, school staff are stepping in where families, society and the Government cannot or will not. So, the upcoming strike is about pay, but it's also about more than that. I know these strikes will be inconvenient for many families, but I hope that teachers are not blamed for standing up for the future of our children. If polls over the weekend are to be believed, there is more support for this teacher industrial action than at any previous time which suggests that many parents and members of the public also believe that teachers, schools and children deserve a better deal.

At Hesse, it is too early to know the extent to which we will be closed on the strike days but we will endeavour to minimise the impact on any specific year group across the planned four days of action and will of course keep in regular contact with you throughout.

Finally, last week I wrote to all parents informing them of the consultation that has opened regarding an expansion of our Sixth Form College buildings. The consultation remains open until Thursday 26 January and more information on our plans and on how to participate in the consultation, can be found here.

More than ever, your cooperation and support are greatly appreciated.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 18 - Friday 27 January 2023

We're all busy. I'm still not entirely sure at what point society decided to make everyone just so busy. When I was young, the talk was about technology being the great change that would unlock leisure time. The machines would do everything and we would sit back and sip a cocktail. That was the promise. So where did we go wrong?

This week has been a particularly hectic week which I thought I might share with you. By comparison with the rest of the week, Monday was a just a normal day of meetings, duties and getting around the school to check in on staff and students. Tuesday morning was a very early start to drop my daughter off at the MKM Stadium for a costume fitting for a movie that is being filmed in Hull. She is one of 300 extras but naturally she thinks that Hollywood will soon be calling and proud dad had to take her there before school to get her prepared. After catching up with the team at Hessle, I went down to Penshurst Primary (part of the 3-19 Academy which also includes Hessle High School and where I am the Head). There I dropped into classrooms, looked at the planned re-modelling works we hope to do in the summer and met with the Head of School to prepare for this week's Governors meeting. Then it was back to the High School for lunch duty and meetings. After school, I met with the Heads of Geography and MFL to review the progress of students and then it was time for our High School Governor's Meeting. These take place five times per year and are an important part of our school leadership and development. Over two hours, Governors asked informed questions about our school development plan, progress of students and other standards in school. One area under discussion was attendance and what we are doing to boost the capacity of our school to deal with the increased absence that all schools have seen since the pandemic started.

Wednesday is my teaching day so that saw me in a classroom with 17 Year 13 students as we get nearer to their final A Level exams. This is the real highlight of my week and it is still great to spend time in front of students. In between times, I held meetings with other leaders to assess our response to next week's strike action and then, after school, I met with Trust leaders and other Heads to coordinate this response across our schools. Following that, I briefed my Senior Leaders again in school.

On Thursday, I met with our Trust CEO. Each month or so, Lizann Lowson meets with each of the Trust Heads for a one-to-one discussion which is an opportunity for me to share how things are going at Hessle, ask for help if needed and generally discuss the direction of the school and the Trust. Her guidance and support is invaluable and I always enjoy these conversations. Throughout Thursday, I liaised with other Trust colleagues to finalise the next stage of our bid to expand our Sixth Form College to cope with the rising numbers of students coming through the school. Just before lunchtime, I managed to complete this and made a note to myself to check it later when I had a clear mind. I find myself able to write documents fairly quickly but I can never be sure that the

document I think is perfect is riddled with errors, typos and contradictions. It is only later when I go back and re-read it that I can be confident I have done a good job.

Then mopped up some other tasks, checked emails etc before lunch duty and then into a recruitment interview in the afternoon. After school, there were more meetings, more emails and then into the Primary Governors Meeting, from 5 until 7.

I always try to clear my desk each day and so after each of these days, I spend thirty minutes or so at home or in my office responding to emails and planning the day ahead. It has been a busy week with some late nights, even more than normal. This week, I haven't had the chance to take my son to football training or my daughter to cheerleading class – that pleasure (!) has fallen to my wife. But this weekend, I will make up for it with a trip to Driffield on Sunday for my son's football match and a promised day out with my daughter tomorrow. She has in mind shopping and Ice Skating. If you see me in A&E over the weekend you will know why.

Finally, please keep an eye on school communications in the coming days and weeks as we provide you with more information on the plans for the upcoming strike days. I wrote a letter to you this morning which can be found here and on this matter, and everything else, I thank you for your support.

Have a lovely weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 19 - Friday 3 February 2023

At the end of each week, I always look back at the previous five days and reflect on how things have gone. Have we done everything we set out to do? Have we supported our students as well as we could have done? Have the planned events (Year 9 Progress Evening) gone smoothly enhancing our reputation? Where we have got it wrong (and we do), have we learned lessons and put it right, and being honest about our mistakes? If I can say 'yes' to those questions then I am content that it has been a good school week.

At the start of the week, I was slightly anxious about the impending strike action on Wednesday. I worried that we might emerge from the day slightly less united as a school community. Strikes always have the potential to divide; striking staff v non-striking staff; staff v leaders and staff v parents/carers. But I hope that we have managed to avoid those pitfalls thanks to the professionalism of my staff and the support and cooperation of our families and community. Within school, things went to plan and I hope that the disruption was not felt too badly in your homes. The next date for potential strike action is 28 February and I will be in touch again in due course with more information on how we propose to manage those days. There will certainly be some form of closure for some year groups but – as yet – it is too early to say which ones.

Next week is a big week for our Year 11 students as they go into another round of mock exams. There are now just eleven school weeks until the start of the external exams in May and many subjects are already on with GCSE assessments in some form or another. I am pleased to see that attendance of Year 11 remains strong and that there are real signs that they are channelling their focus to their studies. The numbers that are staying back each day after school for staff-led revision or private study is very impressive and I thank you for your support in that regard.

Looking back to Wednesday and this was also an important day for another reason. Bruce Springsteen hit the road again for the first time since 2017 with an opening night gig in Tampa with his E Street Band. The concert took place overnight, UK time, and so I woke up to a few texts from people who had sent me the setlist and links to various reviews. If you've read this blog before you will know of my Springsteen fandom and the start of another World Tour is a 'big thing'. This summer I have managed to plan two European breaks to coincide with Bruce's shows in Sweden and Italy and I cannot wait. Although the band are ageing now (Bruce is 73 and most of his bandmates are also in their seventies), they still put on a great show and so seeing them in Tampa via youtube has whetted my appetite for the summer.

On the subject of which, this next week marks the mid-point of the school year and already it is beginning to feel Spring-like. Most of the students are spending their breaks and lunchtimes outside now that the temperature has risen, and we hope to be able to open the school field soon after half term to give them more recreation space. The school year has a real rhythm to it and the arrival of Spring always brings new optimism.

Thank you once again for your support on Wednesday and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 20 - Friday 10 February 2023

Shortly before he passed away, the broadcaster Terry Wogan was asked how many listeners he was broadcasting to during his daily Radio 2 show. "Just the one" replied Wogan, "Just the one."

Wogan was of course referring more to his conversational broadcasting style than to the actual number of listeners he had, which numbered in the millions.....

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One of the mysteries of writing this weekly blog is that I have no idea how many people read it, nor whom. Almost by definition, if you read this regularly, it is likely that you will have an interest in the workings of a school and it may also be the case that you have worked in a school yourself or know someone that has. For that reason, you are probably more empathetic towards staff that work in, and lead, schools and I am sure that thought influences the topics I choose to write about.

One recurring theme is the unrealistic expectations that some people hold about schools, and the staff that work in them. Recently, there was an incident near a school in Surrey. A particularly nasty fight took place involving some of the students from the school after they had left the school site. A number of adults became involved and, naturally, it was filmed and the story was splashed all over social media within hours. The first responsible adults on the scene were school staff (despite the incident occurring a few hundred yards from the school) and they quickly managed to stop the fight. And yet, the story was not about the rise of violence in our community or the problems with social media or even about the irresponsibility of other adults failing to stop it. Instead, it became about the alleged failings of the school. Even before an investigation had taken place, one MP had called for an inquiry into the school.

Sadly, this happens all too often and it doesn't need a fight for blame to be immediately directed at the school. At Hessle High School, we talk to our students all the time about their conduct in the community, to and from school and beyond. If they make mistakes whilst commuting to school, we always respond and work with residents and, occasionally the police, to put things right. But there is a limit to what any school can do. I recall being stopped one Sunday morning whilst walking back to my car after watching my son play football in Hessle. "Some of your kids were up to no good last night, Mr Groak," he said, "riding their bikes around the field and making a right racket till past midnight."

Politely, I pointed out that 'my kids' were in bed at that time and that perhaps he should call the police if he felt their behaviour was anti-social, to which he replied, 'there's no point calling the police, they don't want to know'. Perhaps unwisely I did say that I would speak to my pastoral team and we would remind students again about being responsible members of the community and in doing so I once again accepted some degree of responsibility. I don't need to tell you why that whole scenario is so utterly frustrating, with educationalists being asked to do police work faster than the police themselves are able to do it. And that is without mentioning the responsibility of parents to know what their children are doing at such an hour.

And this is no criticism of the police; like schools and other public services, we have all had budgets cut to the bone for years and struggle to do the work we know needs to be done. I share this thought regularly with my staff. Working in schools has become harder than ever – the demands on our time, our energies and our emotions are much higher than at any time in my 20+ year career. But we are not alone; as public servants, we are needed more than ever to support our families and community through some very difficult times. But they won't last forever. And we should be proud of the work we do, even if it leaves us knackered at the end of the week, or term.

But it is not all bad and, as I write this, it is the middle of the half term break. Already, I have enjoyed a few days rest with a few more to come. I have popped into school today but, when I finish in mid-afternoon, I am going to enjoy a leisurely lunch and later go for a run in the sun.

And also last week, I had the great pleasure of watching some of our young sportsmen in action, namely our Year 10 rugby league team as they played in their Cup Quarter final against Archbishop Sentamu school. I was only able to watch for twenty minutes but for that entire time our lads were camped on their own line defending a lead they had taken in the first half. They worked hard for each other and put their bodies on the line, showing incredible resilience. The lads from Sentamu were just as determined but also great sportsmen; when one of our lads picked up an injury, he was helped from the field by one of the opposition team. Ultimately, the Hessle lads lost in Golden Point extra time but, as disappointed as they were, they shook hands with their opponents and embraced them. It made me hugely proud not just to be their Headteacher but also to work with such great young people every day. There is still lots to be optimistic about after all.

As described in a previous blog, my primary role this week has been to ensure my daughter is on set on time for the movie she is starring in (she's one of 300 child extras but I am certainly not going to contradict her assessment of the size of her role). In doing so, I have also seen a number of Hessle students, and families, doing likewise. It has been a great opportunity for my daughter, and the other children to be involved in such a big production. What stories they will have to tell.

As ever, thank you for your ongoing support and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 21 - Friday 24 February 2023

As I write this on Thursday evening, the sun is beginning to set and – by the time I get home – I know it will be dark and cold. The motivation to go for a run, or to the gym, will be low. There is a Rugby League game on Sky and it will be oh, so easy, to tidy up my work and settle down on the sofa. I know, though, that I will feel better for a run.

I have spoken to our Year 11 students recently about the concept of ‘deferred gratification’ - the principle which encourages individuals to postpone immediate pleasure (sitting on the sofa) in order to act in some other way for an enhanced return at a future date (sitting on the sofa a bit later, feeling smug). In describing this to the students, I showed them a video (The Marshmallow Test) which demonstrates in a fun and easy way.

It is a dilemma that we all face and especially teenagers who have not all developed the cognitive ability and discipline to understand the benefits of deferred gratification. For the Year 11s, it has never been more appropriate as they reach the end of their compulsory school years and have to balance exam revision with the normal life of a teenager. For them, ‘deferred gratification’ means staying after school to attend a revision class, rather than going to a friends to hang out. It means doing some proper ‘deliberate practice’ revision at home rather than watching TV or doodling away on social media. It means making the hard choice rather than the easy one. As adults, we know it is hard (although I am definitely going for a run!) but we must try to convince our students that they can make the right choice and that it will be worth it.

If you are the parent of a Year 11 student, or even if you’re not, please sit with them and watch the Marshmallow Test and have a conversation about what it might mean for their lives.

It has been a good start to the new half term this week, made more pleasant by the arrival of some bright days and lighter evenings. We are still some way from summer, or even spring, but it is definitely on its way. Thank you for the support you have given to your child this week to get them into school, ready to learn. It is appreciated.

It is a relatively quiet weekend for the Groak household. My son is playing football on Sunday morning and will be hoping for a change of fortunes with a new coach at the helm. His under-13s team have struggled this year following several player departures but they have learned some lessons about resilience. It is pleasing to see them still turning up each week and trying their best, despite weekly heavy defeats. They will be stronger for the experience and will appreciate the good times when they surely come.

Finally, please make sure you have read carefully the letter sent to you this week regarding our plans for Tuesday – the second day of Industrial Action by the NEU. A copy of it can be found [here](#).

Have a lovely weekend and enjoy the sunshine.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 22 - Friday 3 March 2023

When I wrote to you last week, I purposely left out any mention of the so-called ‘protest’ trend that was circulating on Tik Tok at the time. I had heard a rumour that it had led to disturbances in some schools but didn’t think it held any risk to us at Hessle. As the weekend unfolded, it became more

apparent that the trend was picking up momentum across a number of social media and I chose to write to you on Sunday to enlist your support in speaking to your children about it.

Thankfully, nothing has occurred here, but that is no fluke. I am especially grateful to our student services team who have very good relationships with students and tend to know exactly what is going on in the students' minds (often before they do!). Thanks to their intelligence, some smart deployment of staff and the general maturity and responsibility of the students themselves, we have come through this unscathed. But the same is not true of all schools, including some in our own local area which saw some appalling and dangerous disruption, whipped up by a minority and unfortunately also encouraged by some parents. I find it utterly mind-blowing that a parent would actively seek to undermine the safe running of their child's school. It beggars belief and I feel so much for the staff in those schools who are already working so hard to improve the life chances of those same children, to then have those efforts so casually thrown back in their face by the parents themselves.

Schools have rules for a reason. Even where a school might introduce a particular tough rule, there will be a good reason for it if you take the trouble to find out what it is. Or better still, why not just trust the school and its leaders? If the school is trustworthy enough to care for the child each day, surely its leaders can be trusted to make good decisions about uniform and other matters?

Anyway, rant over and I return to my main point that I am immensely grateful for your support with this and in general as we continue to navigate a very difficult period of time. Tuesday's NEU strike brought further attention to the difficulties facing schools (and families) at the moment and I am encouraged by the generally balanced and thoughtful coverage being given of this issue in the media at the moment. It seems that the teaching profession enjoys a good deal of support from society in general.

Which is more than can be said of several Conservative ministers of recent times. If you haven't heard of the leaking of Matt Hancock's WhatsApp messages, then I strongly recommend you either start a subscription to the Telegraph or – if you're more sane than that – try to find the highlights on the news or Twitter. Here's a belter from a WhatsApp exchange between him and Education Secretary Gavin Williamson from 2020;

Hancock: What a bunch of absolute arses the teaching unions are

Williamson: I know they really really do just hate work (the poor punctuation is his, not mine)

Williamson got a knighthood (and a £16k payoff) after being sacked as being probably the worst Education Secretary in living memory. Meanwhile, some of my staff are struggling to make ends meet because they've had a real terms pay cut this year. You can draw your own conclusions about how teachers feel about this.

After realising that is two rants in the same blog, let me move onto happier news. As I write this on Thursday evening, our canteen and hall are full of Year 8 parents and carers, students and staff engaged in productive and animated conversations about progress, attitude and their futures. Over 73% of our Year 8 families have attended either last week, or this week's, progress evenings, which is the highest figure since Covid. Clearly, the overwhelming majority of you much prefer the old face-to-face meetings and I want to thank – for that – those parents who took the time to contact the school, and at an event at the start of this year, to urge us to go back to face to face meetings. I began the year feeling that online meetings were the way forward, but my mind was changed, and I

am glad it was. Thank you for your participation in that decision and for your support to all our progress evenings so far this year.

And that brings to an end a rather ranty Blog. Sorry. But let me finish with a plea. Hessle High School first opened, on the old lower school site near Darley's pub, in 1927. Which means that – in less than four years' time – we will begin celebrations for our Centenary. I would love to make this significant event a real celebration of the history of the school, its staff and pupils/students over the years. In order to plan for this, we are looking for interested individuals or groups to work with us to coordinate event(s). If you have an interest in doing this, please get in touch. Nearer the time, we will doubtless ask for more detailed information/archives/photos/memories etc. but for now, we are looking for people to help to plan it. If that's you, please contact me on hhsoffice@hessleacademy.com.

Have a lovely weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 23 - Friday 10 March 2023

What a week!

As I pottered around the kitchen on Monday morning, my wife asked what my day had in store. "The usual," I said, "meetings, duties, checking in on people. Nothing out of the ordinary."

Fast forward a few hours and Mark Owen, our Facilities Manager, stopped me on the corridor to tell me that we had a problem with the water pressure. "It's dropping like a stone," he said, "we've lost the top floor and we're losing the others too." Sounding like a character from a 1970s disaster movie, I could see he was concerned and that this was a problem.

Schools can do without many things, but water isn't one of them. Without water, we have no kitchens and no toilets. The electrician that soon arrived on site quickly diagnosed that the power supply wasn't the issue and we realised that both of our main water pumps which project our water supply around the main building had blown at the same time. We checked and were relieved to find that we still had water supply to Tranby House, our Sixth Form Centre, as well as the PE Block. Okay, but not sufficient to remain open for the rest of the day.

I want to thank you for your support and cooperation with the early closure and also to the staff who managed to ensure that our most vulnerable children got home safely; but mostly to the students who behaved very maturely and sensibly.

It was after 10pm on Monday night when we knew it had been repaired but, even then, we couldn't be sure that the new pumps would support a full reopening which is why we reopened for Year 7 and 11 and the Sixth Form students only. They began the day using the PE Block/Sixth Form facilities but as the day unfolded, we were able to bring the remaining toilets back into use.

With Covid, strikes and now a water pump failure, I am very conscious of the time that students have had away from school, and it does concern me greatly, especially with another additional Bank Holiday on the horizon in May. All I can say is that we continue to make full use of the time that the students are with us and our determination for them to succeed is undimmed. It has been great to see so many of our students staying in school beyond 3pm for extra-curricular clubs and for revision.

Over 100 Year 11 students stayed in school on Wednesday afternoon for GCSE Maths revision, to give just one example.

Please keep a look out for our communication about our range of clubs and teams and one way in which you can do this is through our Arbor Parent Portal. At the beginning of the year, as you are aware, we moved onto a new Management Information System (Arbor) along with the other schools in our Trust. The Arbor Parent Portal is our new communication tool and we are committed to rolling out more content to the portal in the months to come including, student reports, permissions, House Point information as well as giving you a daily reminder of your child's attendance for the year. The Portal can be used via desktop PC or App download. And, finally, in situations such as Monday and Tuesday, the App version will give us another way in which we can reach you (providing you have notifications switched on). If you have not yet activated your account, please do so ASAP. If you need any support with setting it up, please contact us.

Having written about the onset of Spring a few weeks ago, I have clearly jinxed the weather and the cold spell looks set to continue into the weekend. Please keep warm, stay safe and do your best to enjoy the weekend. The warmer weather returns next week (or possibly the week after).

Best wishes

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 24 - Friday 17 March 2023

A few years ago, not long after I became the Headteacher, I invited my dad into school to show him around. My dad left school at 14 and worked on building sites for most of his life. School hadn't been a great experience for him, and he didn't set foot in a school since until I showed him around Hesse High – over 60 years later. Whilst he hadn't enjoyed school himself, he knew its value and made sure that my sister and I worked hard at school and went as far as we could, which meant big sacrifices by my mam and dad when I went off to Leeds Polytechnic, aged 18. I'm not sure who was the proudest on that day I showed him around, but it was a very special hour in our relationship.

Dad didn't say much as we walked around. It was half term so there weren't many people around and we popped into all the different parts of the school. After showing him – and explaining the purpose of – the different office spaces, breakout rooms, LEAP and student services, he just said, "Bloody hell, schools have changed since I went to St Charles'. There was just classrooms, the chapel where we said mass and the Headmaster's office, where we got the slipper."

He could not get over the fact that the work of a school is so much more now, and that almost half of the staff working in schools do not teach (in the traditional sense) but do the vital work of caring for the vulnerable; checking everyone is in school and on time; looking after the building, cleaning it and keeping everyone safe; feeding everyone; answering the phones; organising events; handling the data and organising tests and exams; looking after the computers, the network and the internet; putting up displays; solving problems; communicating with parents; handling the money; and then just dealing with those innumerable other jobs that don't quite fit into anyone's job description but are usually greeted with someone saying, 'I'll do it'. Because it needs doing.

Since visiting the school, I have heard my dad – in conversation with others – defend schools to the hilt, and not just because his son (and his daughter-in-law and son-in-law) work in schools; because he has a deeper understanding of the complexity of the work that we do, and its importance.

I am proud of the cohesive team spirit that we have at Hessle, and I know that there is mutual appreciation of the work that everyone does. But I also know that – as a teacher – there is potential for me to have a blind spot when it comes to understanding the needs and ambitions of support staff. And the same could be said for the rest of the leadership team. At Hessle, Sarah Greenley our Operations/HR Manager, plays a vital role as a passionate voice for the work that all support staff do across the school and really is the mouthpiece in leadership team meetings for all staff across the Academy. We try not to use the term ‘non-teaching’ staff now; as this disrespectfully labels colleagues by what they are not, rather than what they are. ‘Support’ could also be interpreted as ‘secondary’ in the sense of a supporting actor award, but I prefer to think of it as support in the sense of foundational - vital and without which nothing else would happen. That is the true role of support staff in schools, and I wanted to use the blog this week to raise even more awareness of the contribution they make.

Whilst writing this I have heard that the NEU has agreed not to announce any further industrial action whilst they go into ‘intensive talks’ with the Government over pay. This is good news, and it is even better that the talks will also cover the vital issues of working conditions and workload. ‘Pay’ is the headline for this action but, in truth, the main reason why so many leave the profession is because of the workload which I have written about often in this blog. Let us hope that an agreement can be reached that stops the industrial action but more importantly stops the drain of talent from wanting to work in our schools. Our children deserve it.

Have a great weekend everyone.

p.s. Please take a moment to view the new term dates (for next year) which have been placed on the website [here](#). Please note the date for October has changed. Thank you.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 25 - Friday 24 March 2023

No matter who you are, if you work in a school, you will have a view on Ofsted. And not many of them positive. But the quiet discontent against the regulator burst out into public anger this week with the news that a Headteacher had committed suicide after a downgrading of her school, following an Ofsted visit. This tragedy is too familiar to all Heads, including me, who feel the pressure of an inspection. The only member of a school’s staff that is named in an Ofsted report is the Headteacher and so there is no doubt that the outcome of an inspection is felt very personally. It is rare that this leads to tragedy but the pressure is real, every day.

The problem is not Ofsted itself but the single-label judgement which hangs around all schools; Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate.

As parents, you know that schools are complex places, full of strengths, weaknesses and areas for development. To reduce the complexity of an organisation involving hundreds of young people and staff into a single label requires skill and knowledge of an inspection team that few can possibly possess, let alone when based on just two days in a school. The risk is that an inspection team get it wrong, and the school carries that label for years, with all the uncertainty that causes.

As an Academy, including Hessle High School and Penshurst Primary, we were last inspected in September 2018 and were judged to be ‘Good’ across all areas. Our next inspection looms, probably in the next twelve months. Despite Covid and a huge increase in student numbers, we still consider

ourselves to be a 'Good' school, a judgement which is endorsed by our Trust colleagues who monitor us and support us constantly. In some areas, we are better than 'Good' and in others, we know there is still some work to do. That is true of all schools – no organisation is perfect, and schools are the same.

There is therefore a very strong case for Ofsted to remove the single-label judgements that they place on schools which has gathered pace in the light of the death of Ruth Perry, and to replace it with a more nuanced report which shows where a school is strong, and where it is not so strong. Ofsted reports do that already so there is no real change to the inspection framework except to remove the labels. Ofsted – and the Government – argue that the label makes things easier for parents and is easier for them to understand. That is wholly disrespectful to parents and suggests they think parents couldn't be bothered to read a report, or to understand that a school might, say, need to improve the quality of students' writing. My experience is that parents are really interested in how schools work and their assessment of a school goes way beyond a single word. I have many conversations with parents who often share comments such as, "I fully support the school, it's been a great school for my son and my daughter before that, but I think you need to sort out x, or y." And often they're right. Similarly, the feedback through parent surveys is rarely 100% positive, or 100% negative. It is nuanced and helps us to improve. This is what Ofsted could, and should, do, rather than just dropping a label on a school which really doesn't help anyone.

Hopefully change is on the way. The HMI Amanda Spielman has already pushed open the door for her successor to possibly review the use of the category labels, saying the debate is 'legitimate'. Meanwhile, the Labour view is that they will adopt a 'report card' summarising key data and get rid of the labels. The tide is turning in the right direction it seems, finally.

We have received a number of queries from parents/carers about next year's term dates as you start to book your holidays. These have been agreed and can be found here

Finally, this weekend I will be in Amsterdam. Several years ago, I took my son there for a bit of male bonding when he reached the age of 7. We went to the Nemo Museum and then a boat cruise of the canals. It was great. A few months ago, my daughter discovered this and insisted that we have a 'daddy-daughter-Dutch-dash' and so by the time you read this I will probably be on my way to St George's Dock to catch the overnight ferry. Rather than the museum, she just wants to go shopping. Wish me luck as I plan my route around Amsterdam very carefully!

Have a lovely weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 26 - Friday 31 March 2023

"The people you work with are people you were just throw together with. You know, you don't know them, it wasn't your choice, and yet you spend more time with them than you do your friends or your family. But probably all you've got in common is the fact that you walk around on the same bit of carpet for 8 hours a day."

Not my words but those of Tim Canterbury, a character from The Office, a pseudo-reality TV show from the early 2000s.

It is true of most places that some of our strongest relationships and friendships are forged in the workplace, especially when that workplace is one where colleagues are bonded together in a common, and important, purpose. Such as a school.

Today, we have said goodbye to Mrs Bell, one of our Higher-Level Teaching Assistants. Lisa has worked with many students over the years at Hessle and will be well known to many parents/carers and families. She is not only a fantastic professional but a great colleague. When I went to her classroom to see her this afternoon, I could barely get through the door for all the flowers, cards and gifts – a mark of how much she is valued and loved by her friends here. We don't have a high number of staff leave us at Hessle but when they do, it tends to be for entirely understandable reasons. Lisa has found an exciting and important role closer to home and we know she will be a real asset to her new employer. We wish her well.

In a similar vein, earlier today I shared, with our staff, an article on a blog called 'The teaching life'. You can find it here.

If you have never worked in a school and want to read a flavour of what the work is like, please read this. And if you do have experience of our work, I hope you also see some resonance in these words and an appreciation of why teachers do sometimes lay claim to being a bit different to 'normal jobs'. I know there are countless other jobs that provide similar levels of satisfaction and it is just regrettable that this has to be balanced with such poor pay and conditions but hopefully that will change.

If you don't read the whole article, this line was the highlight for me;

Children learning things is a mark of a civilization. Being part of it is a privilege.

How true that it is.

Whatever you are doing this Easter, I hope you find time to relax and spend time with friends and family. I'll be in Spain for most of it, hoping for some sun, a Hull FC Derby victory and some cold beers!

Thank you once more for your continued support of all my staff. Have a very Happy Easter.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 27 - Friday 21 April 2023

"You miss 100% of the shots that you never take" - Michael Jordan

Regret is one of the cruellest of human emotions. We have all done things in life that we wish we hadn't - caused offence to someone, made a big mistake at work, possibly broken the law or transgressed in some other way. But – by and large – these are passing moments. We recover from the mistakes we make and – on occasions – come out stronger because of it.

The worst form of regret is for the things we didn't do. These are the mistakes that you can't put right. These are the choices that we only get to make once, or rarely, in our lives. Michael Jordan knew that – if he didn't take risks – he was not going to be an all-time great Basketball player. We know that – if we don't sometimes step outside of our comfort zone or challenge ourselves – we consign ourselves to a duller life.

I try to live my life without the possibility of regret. I would hate to look back on my life when I am an older man and feel that I have led a life that I wasn't happy with. Inevitably, I am sure there will be regrets; I spend more time at work than I spend with my children – that is a daily issue that myself and my wife wrestle with; I have never lived and worked abroad and probably now never will – that will be a regret when I'm older, I am sure. But – as far as I can – I try to say 'yes' to possibilities when they arise (and often have to pay the bill later!).

Regret is something I am speaking to our students in Year 11 about at the moment. I tell them a story sometimes about GCSE results day. This day in August is one of the finest in our school year and one that all school staff enjoy. It is fabulous to watch groups of young people coming into school, looking happy and refreshed after several weeks away from school and then seeing them open their envelopes. For some reason, they prefer this to be a group activity, standing in a circle, and then opening the envelope at the same time. They then jump in the air, hug each other and often start crying. And sometimes the girls are just as bad!

But amidst this joyful exuberance, there are always the handful of students who come in on their own. They wait until the majority have got their envelopes and then they find a quiet corner, open the envelope, scan the contents and a rueful, but not surprised, expression comes to their face. They know they have underperformed. Then they slowly put the paper back in the envelope and head for the door. We spot them first. And someone goes over to offer some words of condolence and then a plan for how we can help them. We are absolutely there for these students at this time.

Thankfully, this doesn't happen to many students, but it happens every year. And it is heartbreaking. Of course, that young person recovers, finds a suitable pathway, or resits, and they move on with their lives. But they can never substitute that feeling of regret that they have and remember results day as a joyous occasion.

I share this story with Year 11 from time to time and it often resonates with some students in particular. "I'm not going to be the one with the envelope, Sir," they'll tell me and hopefully it means that they've found a new determination to work harder than ever to avoid that sense of disappointment and regret. I hope so.

There is not much time left in school for students in Year 11 but there are still lots of opportunities to make the right choice and to do the best they can. Of course, there is much more time for students in Year 10 and below who we need to motivate just as much. One of the ways we do this is through our extensive personal development and Careers Programme which is superbly led by Miss Lawes. She also writes a regular blog which summarises the events she has planned for our students. If you haven't seen it before you can find it here – with a new blog about to be published. We are very proud of this week.

Finally, it does not look like there is going to be any movement in the talks between the NEU and the Government over the pay dispute and so the strikes scheduled for the next two weeks are likely to go ahead. I have written to parents/carers today with our plans for those days and once again I am very sorry for the ongoing disruption that this is causing to the education of our students. It is probable that this dispute will continue into the rest of the term with more strike days already in the pipeline. All of the teaching unions are now united in their approach that the Government has to tackle the various issues around pay, teacher recruitment, school funding and Ofsted, in the long term interests of our children. I will – of course – keep you fully informed throughout this time.

In the meantime, thank you for your ongoing support and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 28 - Friday 28 April 2023

Yesterday afternoon, the Education Secretary held a webinar for school leaders in which she put forward the Government's case around pay and school funding. It was an attempt to appeal direct to Heads and other leaders and to convince us that school budgets were healthy and that the proposed pay award has been funded. One takeaway was this quote; that schools should "approach their budget setting for the year without certainty over pay"

This is an interesting statement and it is worth a bit of time to explain how school funding works.

The funding of schools is based on a number of factors, the main one being the number of students on roll. This is then multiplied by a sum of money, called the Age Weighted Pupil Unit (AWPU) which varies depending on the age of the child (and also across different parts of the country, but that is a topic for another day). The number of students x amount of £ per student = school funding. Then this is topped up with various other grants or awards depending on the number of SEND pupils or the socio-economic context of the school. So far, so straightforward.

Except that, for many schools, we do not know how many students we will have on roll until March when Year 7 allocations are made, or in the summer, when the number of sixth form students apply. For us at Hessle - a large secondary school, with fairly stable numbers – it isn't too difficult for us to predict the number of students on roll (NOR). However, the secondary factor (the AWPU) isn't confirmed until the summer before the new school year starts in September. At times of low inflation and stability, it is possible to estimate this but, at the moment, it is guesswork.

The reason that this matters so much is because we must work on our staffing levels all year but especially in the Spring when we know how many students we will have, whether we need additional staff or whether we need to replace anyone. This activity starts in early Spring and runs flat out until the end of May. In recent years, as our NOR has grown, this has been a very active period for us, as it is for most schools.

Staff costs represent between 75-80% of our entire budget and so we have to plan the spending of a large chunk of our budget before we know what our level funding is going to be. This happens every year and its utterly ridiculous; a symptom of the way that the Treasury hands out budgets to Government departments and nothing to do with strategic priorities for education policy. This year, it is even worse, which is what prompted Gillian Keegan's quote above.

Elsewhere in her webinar, she insisted that the most recent pay offer to schools has been fully funded. This is not true. The offer of a 4.5% pay increase would be funded by 4% from within school budgets, plus 0.5% of extra funding. The 4% which she claims has been awarded for pay had already been provided to cover the rising costs that schools face from energy and other factors. So the pay offer has not been fully funded.

In order for schools to pay staff this amount, money will have to come from other budgets in school and, considering that 'other' costs only represents 20%-25% of total income, this can only mean less money for resources, ICT, school events or – worse of all – fewer staff, which means bigger class sizes and less pastoral support for children who need it more than ever.

This is the reality and the reason why all teaching unions are now either taking industrial action or are considering doing do so. The next day of action is this coming Tuesday and then we are told

there will be a pause, which is likely to resume later in the summer term if there is no settlement. It is probably that the next dates of action may see other unions also taking action. The NEU represents classroom teachers but they are not the only union. The NASUWT is another large teacher union and the NAHT and ASCL also represent school leaders. All have balloted members and the response has been overwhelmingly in support of further action. In this blog, I have tried to present the factual situation around these strikes, whilst also sharing my frustration over the lack of funding. It is for you to decide your own view on the current dispute. I know that it is worrying for parents to see their child's school closed or partially closed and really wish we weren't in this situation. We can only hope that a resolution is found soon which properly funds schools to do the increasingly complex and important work that we do, and brings an end to the dispute and disruption to learning.

And so we reach the first of three May Bank Holidays this year. It is a great time of the year, but I always think that maximising the benefits of a three-day weekend takes some planning. There is always the risk of ending up with two Sundays, whereas, with effective planning, it is possible to pull off a "two-Saturdays and one-Sunday" kind of Bank Holiday. That's the tack we're taking in the Groak household with a family BBQ planned for Sunday to celebrate my son's birthday and a more restful Monday. Whatever your plans, make full use of it and have a relaxing weekend.

And thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 29 - Friday 5 May 2023

Although there are still ten weeks left until the end of the school year, the thoughts of myself and other senior leaders are firmly fixed on September. At this time of year, we continue to plan our staffing, ensuring we have the teachers and other staff needed to deliver our curriculum and support our students. We are also well into our transition programme for new students who will join us into Year 7 in September. This process runs all year round to recruit and support the next cohort of Hessle students but – each Spring – we really step up our communication with the current Year 6 pupils, and their families, and this takes many forms.

Firstly, as soon as their place is guaranteed, I always like to write to all new parents/carers to welcome them to our school community. This is then followed by a series of 'eCards' which are emailed to families to share key information on the issues they need to know for September; transport, school meals, uniform, curriculum etc. Whilst all of this is going on, some of my colleagues are visiting pupils, and their current teachers, in their primary schools to get to know them and to discover how best we can support them when they start Secondary School. All of this builds to our Transition Week which sees all of our Year 6 pupils come to Hessle High for three days in July, paving the way for them to start here full-time in September. It works well and, thanks to the overwhelming support of our primary school colleagues and my own staff, I am confident that our new intake in September will have the best possible chance of making a smooth transition. If you are the parent/carer of one of our new intake, I hope the information that you are receiving is useful but please contact us if you feel that there is anything missing or that we have overlooked.

This week, I have spent some time interviewing for our new Head Student cohort. This is a group of Sixth Form students who represent the school at internal and external events and who help the Sixth Form staff leaders to shape the provision in our post-16 area. As you know, this is based in the

fantastic Tranby House and I am keen to remind the students how lucky they are to have such a great facility, overlooking our grounds and the Humber Bridge. I look back to my days in the Sixth Form at Sir Henry Cooper School on Orchard Park. As much as I loved my time there, I can't say that the view remotely rivalled what we have here at Hesse. The facility matches the aspiration of our staff and our students and it was a real privilege to spend time talking and listening to such impressive young people, who are determined to succeed but also to go and make their mark on the world. I have great faith in these young people – they are our future and I believe it will be in safe hands.

On the subject of inspirational students, it has been enjoyable recently to follow the rugby league careers of three of our ex-students. Firstly, Brad Fash, who left the school in 2011, is now an ever-present in the Hull FC team and, after winning the player of the year award last year, has now been given a further three-year contract with the club. Brad has also made a lot of headlines with his hairstyle choice and was in the national press again this week!

Jez Litten left the school a few years after Brad and, after a couple of years at Hull FC, is now a key part of the Hull KR team to the extent that, last Saturday, he made his international debut for England against France. This is the first time we have had an ex-student play for his country in a major team sport for many years and I'm sure the whole community wish Jez, Brad, and Jordan Lane (also a first team regular at Hull FC) many more years of success.

Finally, thank you again for your support through the most recent period of industrial action. With the additional Bank Holiday, it is difficult for us all to maintain momentum and routine at the moment, but I can tell you that the students continue to cope with these challenges with great resilience and good humour. Our Year 11 students begin their exams very soon and a sign of that has been the sight of our caretaker team starting to get the exam desks out of storage and begin to set up the sports hall for exams. We have spoken to all of our students about the importance of the next months, including our younger students, asking them to support their older peers with exceptional behaviour and as much as quiet around key spaces as possible. It is a busy and important time and we try our best to reduce the tension and anxiety and allow our Year 11s and 13s to perform to their best potential.

Enjoy the Bank Holiday weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 30 - Friday 12 May 2023

Next week is Mental Health Awareness Week.

The word 'crisis' is often overused, especially in the context of the deterioration of public services. Headteachers have spoken about a funding 'crisis' and a recruitment 'crisis' for as long as I have worked in schools, just as those who work in the NHS speak annually about the 'beds crisis'. The public who don't work in these sectors are probably fatigued by this language and let it pass over them, only concerned if it affects your own health or education or that of your family. But the mental health of children in this country is beyond a crisis. It is – whatever word you can use to describe something that will have a huge impact on the rest of society for many years to come; and we deal with this constantly. Although covid and the cost-of-living crisis are temporary causes, the underlying and main cause of this is social media.

I can't imagine the impact that social media has on impressionable young people. When I was at school, I chose my friends and managed to ignore those people I didn't care for. And they did me. Friendship groups were formed, sometimes fell out and then re-formed again. People drifted in and out of social groups and eventually strong friendships were made. Ex-friends were just that. And if you didn't have the appetite to socialise with anyone you just went home, shut the front door and didn't bother with anyone until the following day. All of that is nigh on impossible for young people now. Everyone has access to everyone else all of the time. There is no respite from the pressure of peers, and ex-friends. Mobile phones and social media are so addictive that it is a well-known fact that the architects of the algorithms that sit behind how Instagram and Twitter work don't allow their own children to use them. Because they know how they are programmed to hook impressionable minds. The Social Dilemma is a fascinating – and terrifying – documentary about this and I would urge any parent to watch this before considering how you will help your child to manage their mobile phone use. My daughter is eight; some of her friends have mobile phones already and of course she wants one. But there is not a chance in hell she is getting one until I know she is able to manage its use properly.

The use of social media is a major cause of mental health problems in children. If you do one thing during Mental Health Awareness Week, please take time to talk to your children about this.

On a lighter note, we have just said goodbye to our Year 11 students for the last time before they begin their formal 'sit down' GCSE exams next week. As a treat, we finished the day with a 'well done' assembly and then brought in an ice cream van. It was lovely. Thank you to any of you that are parents to students in Year 11 or 13 and I wish you well for the weeks ahead, just as much as them.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 31 - Friday 19 May 2023

I am a keen follower of Podcasts. Apart from being interesting, free and widely available, I also find that they numb the boredom when I go for a run!

One of the podcasts I follow is 'The Diary of a CEO' by Steven Bartlett (one of the Dragon's on Dragon's Den). Recently I enjoyed his interview with Dr Robert Waldinger, someone I had never heard of but who I have now begun to follow through a number of TED Talks online. Dr Waldinger is a Professor of Psychiatry and now leads one of the largest ever studies of the factors that lead to human happiness. The most accessible way into his work is through this TED talk, which has been viewed more than forty million times.

This study has been ongoing for 75 years, tracking the lives of over 700 men initially, but now over 2000 members of their families. Every two years, they are interviewed, tested and their lives scrutinised in detail to find out the impact of different factors on their sense of happiness and good mood.

What have they learned?

That the most important ingredient in a happy, healthy and long life is to have good relationships with friends, family and to enjoy a sense of belonging to your community. Even people with poor health and low incomes reported to be happier if they enjoyed good relationships. In contrast,

people that were richer were less likely to be happy if they were in poor relationships or identified themselves as being lonely.

There is a skill to building and maintaining relationships that we learn from an early age. Over time, that skill can diminish as busy lives get in the way of time spent with other people. But the effort invested in maintaining a relationship with a friend always pays back in spades. How many times do we arrange to meet some friends and then, when the day arrives, we consider cancelling because a night on the sofa seems more appealing? But then we make the effort to go out, and we're always glad that we did. The interaction with others gives us far more pleasure than spending time alone.

In schools, the best way we can teach our young people about positive relationships is through modelling them between staff. I always enjoy chatting with colleagues in the canteen or elsewhere on duty; this is good for me to interact but I also like the students to see us sharing a laugh or an exchange of ideas. Where possible, we will involve some students to demonstrate how easily and fluidly people can interact, building confidence. Everyone that works in a school is a teacher and a role model of positive relationships and I am immensely proud of the team spirit that my staff demonstrate every day. Not only do they benefit from this but so do the students, who witness a group of adults working hard, supporting one another and getting huge satisfaction from doing so. This week has given me a few reminders of this. On Tuesday, we invited three of our Year 13 students to a Governor's meeting to talk about their experience as Head Students and of studying in our Sixth Form. They spoke passionately about the support they had received from teachers and the positive relationships they have built. Throughout the week, I have also had catch-up meetings with some of our newer teachers (Early Career Teachers – ECTs), all of whom have praised the support and friendship of their colleagues across the school. This makes me very proud and also optimistic that – in an increasingly brutal and often cruel world – our students see the very best of human instinct on a regular basis. And that can only help them to live happier lives.

This week has also seen the start of the GCSE and A Level examinations and I can report that this has gone well. The detailed plan has been executed to perfection and thank you to all parents and carers and step-parents and grandparents and step-grandparents and brothers and sisters and everyone else (!) that has supported our young people this week. It has been a great team effort so far.

Thanks for your ongoing support and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 32 - Friday 26 May 2023

This has been a very family-focused week for me. I come from a fairly big family; my mum had six sisters and so I have plenty of cousins and – unusually – most of them still live in and around Hull. Sadly, we don't see very much of each other these days so when we met up a few months ago at one of our Aunt's 80th birthday, we resolved to get together for a drink. And so, last Saturday, seven of us met up in a city centre pub. After a bit of a catch-up, the old photographs came out and, after a few drinks, the stories got funnier and dafter. And then the dancing started but I'll share no more than that. But it reminded me of last week's blog where I wrote about the importance of maintaining relationships with friends and family and I was so glad that I made the effort to go out.

The early part of this week involved my own family and watching my son play cricket, in particular. At just turned 13, he was a bit anxious about making his debut for Kirkella Under-15s on Monday night, but he knows that most boys 'play up' and that the older lads are sensible in how they look

after the younger ones. Well, it was a dream debut for him as he almost secured their first win of the season with a brilliant bowling performance. He isn't a fast bowler, but he is very accurate, and his four overs went for just eight runs, bowling at the death. If you don't follow cricket and don't know what much of that means, I'm sorry, but it means he was really good. And of course, I was incredibly proud, as you would expect.

Next week, we are travelling to Belgium with my wife's family to visit Ypres. I have never visited that part of the world before and we are planning to visit some of the battle sites from the First World War and some of the memorials and graves of my wife's side of our family. It will be a different type of trip for us, but I know our children will also learn a great deal about history and where they themselves come from.

As I write this, we have just concluded our latest series of interviews for new teachers ahead of the new school year. The end of May is the deadline by which teachers need to resign in order to be able to start at a new school in September and so it is a busy time for schools; together with the ongoing GCSE and A Level exams, it feels nearly impossible to fit everything in. We have added a few extra teachers to our staff to cope with increasing numbers again and we are also creating a couple of internal roles which have also required selection and interview processes. We will, thankfully, be fully staffed in September which is a near-miracle when I look at the number of jobs still available and advertised on schools recruitment sites. The best recruitment strategy for us is always our students, and the existing staff, who are proud to be associated with our school and burnish its reputation at every opportunity. As, I know, you do, and for which I am very grateful.

Finally, next week is half term and the students can take a well-earned break before the final half term of the year, which will be packed with activity – exams, trips, sports day, celebration events and transition activities. It never stops!

Have a lovely Bank Holiday Weekend and thank you again for your continued support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 33 - Friday 9 June 2023

There are certain days when the variety of responsibilities of a Headteacher are really brought home to me. And today was one of those. Nothing in my career really prepared me for doing this job, certainly not in terms of experience and training. You just rely on the skills and personal attributes that you have developed and hope that they will be enough to help you to cope with the range of challenges that emerge daily.

At the end of each day, I always run through my diary for the following day, ensuring that I am prepared for key meetings and – where my time is not already accounted for – that I know what I want to achieve in any remaining time.

Despite a busy day ahead, I am not one to arrive in school extremely early. As you know I have two small children and so we all get ready for school/work together and so I tend to arrive between 7.30 and 7.40. The day then starts with our Senior Leadership Team meeting at 7.45. A ten minute catch up to ensure that any staff absences are covered and that we are all aware of any particular events taking place (such as exams) and the plans thereof. Then I grab a quick coffee and head outside to greet the students as they arrive.

Our Year 11 students are the main focus at the moment. Exams are coming thick and fast and the pastoral team and their tutors are soon outside amongst them, issuing words of guidance and encouragement before this morning's GCSE Geography exam. The relationships are terrific to see.

My first meeting of the day is a finance one and so I spend an hour with my Finance Manager, Claire Khan, and my key Operations Manager, Sarah Greenley. Being a member of a Multi Academy Trust brings the benefit of a degree of financial stability and our job is therefore to ensure that there is sufficient autonomy for key staff to use our funding to the maximum benefit of students. At this time of year, we are ensuring that the plans we had in place for this year are being delivered financially but also looking ahead to make sure we have the staffing and resources in the right place for the next academic year. I actually enjoy finance meetings and always try to make sure that Claire and Sarah can see the impact of their work, delivering the resources to help staff to make a difference to children's lives.

Elsewhere this morning, I held two meetings with staff regarding their own future plans and development. I aim to be proactive as possible where staff development is concerned, and hope staff see me as someone they can approach to talk to about their ambitions and sometimes their frustrations. The outcome of both was to agree plans of how we can support these colleagues to further develop within our school. Growing our own leaders is one of my most important roles and I often say to staff that the next senior leaders, and probably the next two or three headteachers, already work here at Hessle.

In between meetings, I was out and about on corridors catching up with people and receiving an update from my safeguarding lead. The risks facing our young people now have never been more serious. The increasingly difficult economic situation, the diabolical pressures of social media and the hangover of the pandemic combine to make life very challenging for many of our young people and the impact of this is so often picked up by safeguarding teams in school. Some of their work is unbelievably difficult and there are not enough words to express my admiration and respect for what they do. Amongst all the people working in public service, those working in safeguarding in schools and colleges carry a heavy burden right now and deserve all our gratitude.

My next scheduled meeting was with my Deputy Head. This is a routine meeting where we review the curriculum, discuss any issues around resource provision and staff training and development. At the moment, a focus is planning the timetable for next year and ensuring that we have staff deployed in the right areas and that we are providing the broadest possible range of courses. This is a challenge every year as we seek to match our staffing to the anticipated demands of our students (especially those in Year 9 and 11 who are choosing courses for next year). Mrs Price leads on this and does a terrific job keeping as many people happy as possible before the publication of timetables later in the year.

As I explained to you before half term, we have managed to recruit the additional teaching staff that we require for 2023-24. This is not by chance and is due to the strong reputation that we enjoy amongst school staff in the region and in the community. You play as much a part in that as any of my staff with the support you give us. Thank you for that – it is invaluable and greatly appreciated.

I grab my lunch whilst on lunch duty (fish and chips on a Friday, which I enjoyed eating in the sunshine today), and then help colleagues to settle the students back into classes for the afternoon lessons. The last couple of hours involved further meetings (music tuition provision and a meeting with a parent), trying to whittle down the unread emails, a bit of time walking the corridors and

another catch up with the safeguarding team, before going back on duty on the zebra crossing as the students leave the site.

A busy day, one in which I achieve most of what I set out to achieve, but where I spent more time in my office than I would normally like to, and not enough time in classrooms. But some days are just like that.

Finally, let me draw your attention to a new Trust Complaints Policy. Not something that I often talk about in this blog but I am always keen to ensure that parents/carers and staff in school can communicate in an open, honest and effective way whenever we do not see eye to eye. A proper process for doing this is sometimes necessary and so I was happy to work with colleagues across our Trust to develop this new policy. Should you require it, it can be found on the school website under 'statutory policies'.

As I described in my last blog, my half term break was a busy one, filled with a trip to Belgium and the cricket grounds of London. This weekend offers some respite from a busy few weeks and so I intend to spend most of it in the garden, cutting the grass, power-washing the patio furniture (a bizarrely enjoyable job!) and then enjoying the view of it, with a glass of something cold in hand.

Whatever your weekend brings, enjoy it and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 35 - Friday 23 June 2023

You may have seen in the news that the NEU have chosen two further dates on which they intend to take industrial action in pursuance of their pay claim against the Government. These are Wednesday 5 and Friday 7 July. Once we have assessed the impact of this, I will contact you with further details on the extent to which we will be able to open for students. Nevertheless, disruption appears inevitable which I greatly regret.

Meanwhile, all of the unions and professional associations with members that work in schools are currently undertaking ballots of their members before deciding whether to take further, simultaneous action in the Autumn term. The dispute has moved on somewhat since the start of the year and now takes in issues of wider school funding as well as the current Ofsted framework. The outcome of these ballots should be announced before the end of term and the dates for any action may also be announced. I will keep you informed.

One of the issues at the heart of the dispute is the funding of any potential pay award. Earlier this month, the independent STRB recommended a pay award of 6.5% for teachers in England. This – they felt – would help to retain wages at a competitive level at a time when inflation currently outstrips that figure, as well as going some way to prevent the retention crisis in schools. With fewer and fewer people entering teaching, it is imperative that we retain those we already have. Since this recommendation was 'leaked', the Government have refused to release the actual report and have said nothing about the pay award for next year, nor how it will be funded. In the meantime, I am trying to put my budget together for next year, without knowing the size of my staffing costs (which represents nearly 80% of my outgoings) or my actual income. It is impossible. In recent years, this information has been given to schools on the final day of term or even in the summer break. Looks like I may be finalising the budget from the beach again this year! It doesn't have to be this way, it really doesn't.

Back to in-school matters and this week has been a quieter one in school with the majority of our Year 11 and 13s having already completed their GCSE and A Level exams. Everyone's focus now turns to the end of term events and the planning for the next academic year, all of which gives us a boost of energy and optimism for the month ahead. There is so much going on at the moment, so let me give you a flavour of the activity in school, beyond classroom-based learning.

Last weekend saw a group of 17 students and 6 staff embarking on the Duke of Edinburgh expedition which saw them hiking 22 miles over two days, with a night's (wet) camping in between. In the coming weeks, another 25 students will also participate over two weekends with members of staff supporting them in their own time to provide students with a fantastic set of life experiences.

Other similarly intrepid groups have left the site this week; our group of Year 12 Geographers chose the wettest day of the week to head off to Spurn Point on Tuesday to do their A Level fieldwork study, the same group are also heading to Sheffield today in similar pursuit.

On Monday, our Year 10 boys' rugby league team attracted a decent crowd of staff, students and parents to the touchline for their Yorkshire Cup Semi Final against the Saledine Nook School in Huddersfield. I was able to catch the latter stages of the game which saw them victorious by 30-24. They will now meet Sirius Academy West in the Final in July and we wish them well.

It is always great to follow our sports teams and to see their maturity, teamwork and resilience but our students' success is not limited to school-organised teams. We have a wide range of students who are hugely successful in their chosen fields through clubs outside of school. Such a case occurred recently when a group of our students travelled down to London to take part in the British Arts Awards. This competition started locally with a series of heats before culminating in national finals. The event involved students ranging from Year 8 to 12 and I'm delighted that they won their group dance with a performance inspired by Alice in Wonderland. There were also a number of individual successes too.

On a more serious note, on Wednesday, we welcomed visitors from The Breck Foundation to deliver assemblies to students about the very real risks that young people face online. The founder of TBF has been a friend of the school for many years and has shared with thousands of our students her own harrowing story of how her son lost his life as a consequence of online grooming. It is a shocking story to hear but one we firmly believe needs to be heard by our young people as they navigate the rewards and risks of living their lives increasingly online. As parents, we all worry about this issue and I would highly recommend their website, where you can find plenty of material to help you discuss this with your child.

All of our efforts in the past few weeks have been aided by the way in which students have conducted themselves. At a time when Year 11 and 13 students are focusing on exams, it is important that the other students 'step up' to play their part in getting on with things as quietly and sensibly as they can. This has been the case and – with the warm and dry weather – they have adapted to this equally well. Uniform standards have remained high and students have been sensible in how they exert themselves and stay hydrated.

Thank you – as ever – for your ongoing support and encouragement and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 36 - Friday 30 June 2023

I have written many times in this blog about the impact on schools of the steady decline in our country's public services. Families – unable to gain the support they need from health professionals, social workers or the police – often turn to schools for this help, simply because we are the most accessible place for them to come to. This trend continues and is becoming more and more acknowledged by the media.

Likewise, there has been a significant shift in attitudes towards school amongst some students and families whereby the compulsory nature of school attendance appears to be in question. This adds an increasing burden on our staff (who are held to account for our attendance) to get students into school and help them to settle and catch up when they do.

In addition, all schools are reporting more challenging behaviour from some students at a time when there are fewer resources or specialist support to help those students and their families. Once again, the burden of this is picked up by school staff which is contributing to a shocking number of teachers leaving the profession.

It is regarding the latter issue (student behaviour) that I want to focus on in this blog. Whilst the overwhelmingly majority of our students continue to behave very well, we have not been immune to this rising behavioural challenge, although in a recent survey carried out by our Trust, our staff felt confident that we had the capacity in school to face this challenge. So I am, and remain, optimistic.

And this response had begun already. In recent weeks we have spoken to the students about positive attitudes and something that we are calling the Behaviour Curriculum. Just like any other curriculum, or programme of study, this sets out in detail precisely what we expect students to do in school. It goes back to basics and will remind students of each rule and routine we have in school. From Monday, students will be issued with these reminders in every single lesson until the end of term. And, when they come back in September, they'll be reminded again. We have also identified behaviours that go 'above and beyond' and deserve reward, such as holding a door open for someone, helping a younger student who may be lost or look upset or helping a member of staff carry books etc. These will be rewarded in line with our school values.

By the start of the new term, there will be some other changes too, and these will be reflected in a new behaviour policy which I will share with you. We have also invested further into our pastoral team, adding another senior leader into the team and offering the opportunity for staff to take a short-term secondment into the team to increase capacity but also to ensure succession planning for the future.

We believe these are necessary changes. When students come to school they need to behave and move amongst other students that are behaving too. Your support with these changes is vital; it is imperative that we have parental support for our determination to maintain, and improve, standards of behaviour. We cannot work at odds with parents as has occurred at times this year. As individuals and as a school, we do get things wrong and we try to put things right and apologise when that happens but I will not tolerate any parent/carer abusing my staff which has also occurred this year and I will be writing to all parents before the end of term clearly setting out our mutual expectations of each other.

In other respects, nothing changes. We have a strong reputation for the high standards of our uniform, and we are making no changes to that this year. I am also delighted with the relative stability of our staffing going into the new school year. We have made some appointments to meet

the needs of our students, and another year where student numbers will rise but we have very few departures this summer once again, which is a testament to the commitment of the staff to your school and your children.

Finally, next week sees the continuation of the NEU Industrial Action with two days of strikes on Wednesday and Friday. I have written to all parents/carers this week setting out our plans for these days and continue to regret the disruption that these strikes are causing. Nevertheless, I cannot disagree with the need for school staff to stand up for the education of our children and I fully respect and support our colleagues right to take this action. I know that some of you disagree with this view, and I respect that too, although the majority of parents that contact the school do so to express their support for school staff. Whatever your view, thank you for your support – it really is appreciated.

Have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 37 - Friday 7 July 2023

Last week, I outlined me of the changes that we are making to drive up standards of behaviour. I can report that the introduction of our Behaviour Curriculum has gone well this week with students responding positively to the consistent and reasoned reminders of expectations. This continues until the end of term and into the new Academic year.

One of our Academy Development Priorities next year will be to ensure that behaviour remains good and that relationships among pupils and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture. We have always prided ourselves on the superb relationships that students develop with their teachers and other staff; these are priceless and are the reason why so many of us look back fondly on our school days.

When I was at school, I was fortunate to have a positive experience, enjoyed most lessons and achieved good grades in exams. But I don't remember doing any of those exams. I don't even remember going into school to pick up my results. What I do remember, and will never forget, are the relationships I had with my friends, but also with my teachers. I remember Mr Robinson lighting a spark in me which gave me a fascination in Economics, which I then went onto study at university and continues to fascinate me to this day. I remember my Head of House, Mr Lake, sharing his interest in sport and even taking me and another lad to watch a Hull FC game on one occasion. I also remember my A Level English teacher, Mr Garry, for his passion for the subject and his interesting use of vernacular when we got a Shakespearean quote wrong! And I remember my PE teachers, not because I was particularly good at sport but because I enjoyed the discipline they brought to the school and their sense of taking responsibility for yourself. In short, my memories of school are about the people, not the lessons or the grades. And that is what we want for all of our students at Hesse (as well as the grades, of course).

In bringing in changes to our behaviour policy, the risk is that this crowds out the positives and the joy of being in school and so we are determined to avoid this pitfall. One of the ways we intend to do that is to relaunch our Personal Development programme (more on this in the new school year) which begins with an Inclusion Day on Tuesday 18 July. The centre point of a day of fun, team-building activities will be our "It's A Knockout" course which we will bring into school for the day, and which will allow students and staff to participate in House and tutor teams. It promises to be a

great day with a very important purpose – to provide students with an opportunity to work with new people and to recognise the importance of working in teams of students and staff alike.

As we reflect on the past two days of strike action, there has been one minor benefit of this – it has enabled those staff in school to spend more quality time with the students in Year 10. As our students get older and closer to their final exams, the trust between students and staff is crucial. Students must know that the staff have their best interests at heart, even when they are chasing homework or challenging them about punctuality and uniform. Spending time together away from the normal routine is the best way to build trust. This is why corporations spend so many billions on team-building and corporate hospitality. It matters and it works.

The weather forecast for the weekend does not look good and has already forced me to cancel the BBQ I had planned for my leadership team tomorrow. This annual get-together of all our families at chez Groak is another example of important relationship building as well as an opportunity for me to show off my latest BBQ recipe but also for Mrs Price to demonstrate her cricketing talents in the garden. Never mind, we will try again in September. My attention turns instead to Sunday and the Hull FC-Hull KR derby – a must win game for both teams and one I will be watching on TV (probably with a leftover burger!).

Whatever you are doing over the weekend, enjoy it and thank you as always for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

WEEK 38 - Friday 14 July 2023

You will have heard the news yesterday afternoon that the Government have agreed to meet the 6.5% pay award for all teachers which was recommended by the independent STPCB a few months ago. As well as that statement, I was also pleased to see that the offer does appear to be fully funded. All teaching and school leaders' unions have issued a joint statement which recommends this offer to its members and it does appear that this will bring to an end -for now - the industrial dispute and any further planned strike action. This is good news for all of my colleagues, for our students and our parents/carers who can hopefully look ahead to a new academic year without the threat of further industrial action.

This would not have been achieved without the combined actions of all teaching and school staff unions, particularly the NEU who have led on the industrial action and made the sacrifices of taking strike action. But also the resolution of members of the NASUWT, ASCL and NAHT who were clearly determined to follow suit. But crucially it would not have been successful were it not for the overwhelming support of parents/carers who recognised that the action was not just about pay but about the future of education in our country and the need for it to be funded properly and for teacher retention to be taken seriously. We are still a long way from achieving that aim but this is the first time that I can remember in my career where the combined voice of teachers, leaders and parents/carers have brought about a reasonably positive response from Government. Let us hope that this same determination can continue to bring fair pay not just for teachers but also for our support staff who earn much less on average than teaching staff yet whose roles in schools are just as vital to the education and development of students. I also hope that momentum continues to move towards proper reform of Ofsted which is also something that the Government have pledged to continue to review. Ofsted reform is just as important in retaining teachers and leaders and is much cheaper than the cost of this week's pay award.

As we reach the end of the term, I met yesterday with colleagues on our Trust's Wider Leadership Team and we took some time to celebrate the highlights of our year. One common theme was the pleasure that everyone had got from seeing the return of so many educational visits and other extra-curricular events in and out of school. There has seldom been a day in the past few weeks when there hasn't been a bus or two lined up at the start of the day to take students out on a trip. The importance of this was demonstrated with a remark from one student that was heading out on a Geography trip to Filey, that they had never visited the coast before. There have been several trips such as these in recent weeks and months and I am hugely grateful to the staff who give up their time to plan and support them. It provides a great life experience for the students.

Another highlight of the week came on Wednesday when our Year 10 (with some Year 9) Boys Rugby Team won the Yorkshire Plate Final against Crawshaw Academy, 16-0 at Hull University's ground. The boys have performed brilliantly throughout their run to the final and have always demonstrated great resilience and sportsmanship. Well done to them all, we are very proud. And we are also just as proud of Mr Compton who coached the team with the support of Mr Griffiths. It is a great achievement for the school.

With just a week to go until the end of term, I am delighted to see the students continuing to respond positively to the Behaviour Curriculum that we introduced a fortnight ago. We will be making some other changes to our behaviour routines and policy ahead of September and it is my plan to send out more information on this before the students return to school in September.

Next week's blog will be an extended communication which will include lots of information about the new term, key dates and so on. Please look out for it next Friday and keep to hand for reference over the summer. For now, enjoy the weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher