



**CHENEY SCHOOL**

*Think for yourself, act for others*

Headteacher: Mr Rob Pavey

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Cheney Lane  
Headington  
OX3 7QH

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## Mr R Pavey – Headteacher

21st October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Normally in a letter at this time of term, I would highlight a few of the achievements of our students, mention some sporting fixtures, a handful of music performances, and perhaps some outside speakers. This time, our achievement is to have opened the school, to have kept it open and to have educated 1,600 young people. All of the extra-curricular things will come back (and perhaps sooner than we may think - our new house system launches after half term, with an art competition), and it is no small thing to be able to say that we have managed to teach our full curriculum.

I am genuinely delighted to say that we have made it to half term (or almost at the time of writing) without any confirmed cases among students or staff, and without having to close the school in full or in part. I would like to say a sincere thank you to all our staff at Cheney for the extraordinary effort that has gone into making this possible, and to all our parents and carers for supporting the school. It is a real testimony to the collective effort that our attendance rate is actually slightly up on this time last year (apologies if you don't like statistics, but about 7% higher than the national average for secondary schools up to October 8th); it is still not high enough, but we are moving in the right direction, despite all the headwinds. Being in school means that our students have been learning. Again, the maturity that almost all our students have shown, and the way they have adapted to our new way of working, has been fantastic, and is what makes teaching worthwhile.

### **Lessons from the trial lockdown days**

Overall, the trial lockdown days were a great success, and showed that we will be able to continue delivering a full curriculum, come what may. Thank you for all the feedback that has come in, either directly, or via students in tutor time. The main issues identified are as follows:

- Length of online day: many people reported that a full day in front of a screen is more exhausting than a day physically in school. In the event of a full or partial lockdown, we will stick to the normal published timetable, but have a mixture of live lessons, and tasks set via Google Classroom. Lessons will also contain a

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mixture of live teaching and individual work, so that students have a break from staring at the screen.

- **Slow computers:** the major problem with lessons was the speed of our very old computers. This is being addressed over half term, and our IT team are converting the slowest machines to Chrome devices. This means stripping out the heavy Windows operating system and anti-virus software, and making them behave like Chromebooks, which have their being on the cloud. It sounds metaphysical, but we've tried it, it works, and it's cheap.
- **Access to technology:** the other big barrier is whether all our students have access to a sensible device for work (not a mobile phone) for the whole school day. More on our appeal and the Chromebook order below; this will address a large part of the issue. In most circumstances (except being sent home by Track and Trace) any student who still cannot reliably get online will still be expected in school.
- **Lessons being slow to start:** this is partly because of the slow technology issue, and partly because teachers are having to cross the site to get to their next lesson. In case of a full lockdown, the travel time would disappear; if a year group has to be sent home, unfortunately there is nothing we can do about the travel time while teachers are not in their specialist rooms, so we would ask for parents to bear with us.

### **Potential 'circuit-breaker'**

At the time of writing, there has been no announcement of an extended half term as a 'circuit breaker' to slow the spread of the virus. If it is announced while we are closed, I will be in touch as soon as I know about it. To be clear, if it happens, this will not be a week's extra holiday, but will be a week's online learning, following the normal timetable.

### **Live-Streaming Lessons**

You will be aware that we have been working hard to embed live-streaming of lessons, which has been very successful for the limited number of students who have had to stay away from school for an extended period. Our expectation after half term is that all lessons will be available for live-streaming, and we are working to make it part of teachers' start of lesson routine to plug in their webcam and start the Google Meet if they see an absence on the register.

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The other side of the coin is that we expect students who are absent from school to join their lessons via the Google Meet, if they possibly can. Clearly, if a child is too sick to do so, it is not expected, but in some cases, students may be well enough to join a lesson from home, even if they aren't well enough to do a full day in school. An email to teachers saying that this is the intention would be helpful, as they have a hundred things to think about at the start of a lesson, and it is very easy to forget additional elements such as this.

Please don't misinterpret this as meaning that school is now optional! It isn't; we still expect every student in every lesson in person, but a second best option, where absence is unavoidable, is to join lessons virtually.

### **Chromebook order and technology appeal**

Many thanks for the response to our technology appeal. I am delighted to say that this has raised £12,600 to date, which will provide access to more than 90 children and will allow them both to submit digital homework and to be prepared for any future school closures or lockdowns. We have placed an order for several hundred Chromebooks, using both the money raised through the appeal, and some of the government's Covid catch-up funding. There is very high global demand for laptops at the moment, so the delivery date is not likely to be before December, but the order is confirmed. This will allow us to provide a device to all children who currently qualify for free school meals, and for all parents who expressed an interest in buying a new device through the school. We will be in touch with precise details after half term, when we have a firm delivery date.

### **Free School Meals**

Unfortunately, Oxfordshire does not currently support online applications for Free School Meals. If your income has dropped, please do consider applying by asking for a form at reception. The canteen system does not publicly identify children who pay for their lunch, or those who get it for free, so there is no disadvantage. There are also certain advantages which come later, such as access to financial help for trips. Further information is on the link below:

[https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/school/school-meals?utm\\_term=nil&utm\\_content=](https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/schools/school/school-meals?utm_term=nil&utm_content=)

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## **Specialist Rooms**

One of the major disadvantages of the year group bubbles is that it limits access to specialist rooms. As a school, we have to balance the potential harm to students' education (especially in exam years) with the potential risk to health of year groups mixing. We have been able to reintroduce some specialist rooms, with an enhanced cleaning system, and students escorted to the room to avoid other year groups. This is complicated, and there is a limit to what we can achieve while keeping the bubbles meaningful, but we are continuing to reintroduce specialist rooms where we can.

## **Summer exam timetable and change of INSET day**

The government recently announced a delay to the summer exams. This will give us a little more revision time in May, which is welcome. Our plans for internal assessments and end of year exams will not change, except that most of them will take place in classrooms, rather than in the exam hall. The possible exception to this is Year 12, who may well sit formal exams in the hall at the end of the Easter term, as they did not sit GCSE exams, and will not be able to do formal exams in June. Further details will be sent to Year 12 parents and carers in due course. We will share the summer exam timetable with students and families in exam years as soon as the last few exam dates have been finalised.

One effect of this is that we are going to move the INSET day currently scheduled for late June to the day after the February half term holiday, to allow departments to finalise plans for using this extra revision time most effectively. School will therefore now be closed to students on Monday 22nd February 2021, and 22nd June will be a normal school day.

## **Virtual Assemblies**

You are probably aware that assemblies moved online a few weeks ago as the background infection rate started to rise. This will continue for the foreseeable future, as it seems to me to be a proportionate response to the situation, although we regret the loss of another element of the collective life of the school. Hopefully, the relaunch of the house system will help to counteract the erosion of the school's community spirit.

## **Mask Wearing**

As the situation with the pandemic has got worse, we have stepped up our policy on wearing masks. We are not currently planning on making masks compulsory, as

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enforcement is very difficult with teachers needing to move to their lessons in other buildings, rather than being available to control the corridor outside their classrooms. We are integrating mask-wearing reminders into our end-of-class routine, reminding students that they should be putting their masks on if they are about to enter a busy corridor, and having a mask is part of the tutor-time checks at the beginning of the day. We ask parents to help us in this, by checking that students have a mask with them as a matter of course, as we cannot provide masks except in emergencies.

### **Ventilation in Classrooms & Coats**

It is difficult to keep windows open as the weather gets colder, but we ask teachers to ventilate rooms as much as possible. If it is cold in a room, we will allow students to keep their coats on

### **Year 9 parents evening**

Year 9 parents evening is the Thursday after half term, 5th November. This will run via Google Meet, and parents will receive a letter with the appropriate links a couple of days in advance. As usual, there will be 5 minute slots, and we ask both parents and staff to stick to these timings. Students will get the appointment booking sheet on the first morning back, and will need to get round all their teachers efficiently; booking sheets handed out this side of half term are not likely to make it through to November.

### **Late start Friday November 6th**

Following Year 9 parents evening, there will be no tutor time on Friday November 6th. Students need to be in school by 9am rather than 8.30am, although school will be open from 8am as usual.

### **House System**

We are excited to be launching our new House system after half term. Some of the longer standing members of our Cheney community will remember we used to have a College system that functioned similarly to the traditional House system. The principles behind a College/House systems are ones that the SLT at Cheney feel passionately about therefore we have decided to revive, relaunch and reset. As part of this, we will be using the more widely used term of Houses, and renaming them. We are currently recruiting Heads of Houses, and canvassing the views of our staff and students. We would also like to welcome you to share your thoughts with us, including what names you would like to see for our Houses, and important aspects of the system that you

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would like to see embedded. Please complete the below form if you have an opinion on the House system that you would like to share. We look forward to sharing with you next term our new House names and introducing our first House competition.

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdzoDiOq6yfqrDOzDj0WSrFiPyKXZM9VoGEh0i\\_8d0YMF2PAA/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdzoDiOq6yfqrDOzDj0WSrFiPyKXZM9VoGEh0i_8d0YMF2PAA/viewform?usp=sf_link)

### **Open Event**

Some of you may have already seen our open event page on the website. This is not an 'open day' as such, but will remain available permanently as an introduction to the school. Please do have a look if you have time, and share it with your friends and family, particularly those who may have children in Year 6 who are making their secondary school choices this month: <https://www.cheney.oxon.sch.uk/about/6085-2/>

### **Term dates**

Our 2021-2022 Term dates are now available: <https://www.cheney.oxon.sch.uk/term-dates/>

### **Cheney Friends**

Cheney Friends AGM is currently planned to take place virtually on the evening of Wednesday 4th November. Please watch out for a notice with more details when we return.

### **Road Safety & Travel to School**

We need to remind all parents and carers who drive their children to school to be considerate when dropping off and picking up. We have an increasing number of incidents of cars parking on the pavements on Gypsy Lane, as well as on Cheney Lane itself and on the pavements and bicycle lanes at the junction of Cheney Lane with Warneford Lane.

Students on foot have to navigate these pavements and cross these roads as they enter and leave the school site, and our cycling students need to use the cycle lanes and manage the junctions. All our students should be able to enter and leave the school site as safely as possible, especially as we head into the shorter days of winter. This behaviour, alongside entering the staff car-park without express permission, endangers our student and staff community.

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On a more positive note, we are pleased to see so many of our students using the new crossing at the top of Morrell Avenue, and would encourage those families whose children walk to and from the East Oxford / Divinity Road and St Clements areas to remind their children to use this safe route. We are seeing lots of Year 7s using the new crossing, but it appears that some of our older students are finding it harder to change their habits and are still opting to cross busy Warneford Lane.

We would also request your support to encourage all students to be courteous to the general public as they travel to and from school; not to travel in large groups and, if they are walking, to allow adequate pavement space for other pedestrians. Please also talk to any of your children that travel to school on buses to remind them that we are all required to wear masks on public transport.

### **Parent Governor**

We have 5 applicants for the post of Parent Governor on the Cheney Local Governing Body. Our Chair of Governors would appreciate it if you would take the time to read the applicants' personal statements and relevant skills by clicking on the [Parent Governor Election Form](#) and vote for your preferred candidate by 9am on Friday 30th October.

Finally a reminder that our last day of this half term is Thursday 22nd October and we will be finishing at the normal time of 3pm. We reopen as usual on Monday 2nd November.

Thank you as ever for your continuing support.

Kind regards

**Rob Pavey, Headteacher and All Staff at Cheney School**

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