



Dear Friends,

I hope that you are all remaining safe and well and that – for all of us – that there is increasingly light at the end of this rather dark tunnel.

Following on from my earlier email I thought it might be helpful if I updated you with the situation at the College. Things have worked out pretty much as I indicated they would in my last letter, but I am pleased to report that the mood is very positive, given the context in which we are operating. The governors and senior team have been a fantastic support as we have charted a path through the various issues that we have had to face; the teaching staff have risen magnificently to the challenge of delivering most of their teaching through a screen and our customer satisfaction surveys suggest that had gone very well indeed; I should not ignore the fact that the vast majority of our parents have been extremely supportive and positive. I take none of these features for granted. While I hope all governing bodies have rallied around at this time I know from talking to other independent school heads that many schools seem to have far greater problems with parents and their unwillingness (as opposed to inability) to pay fees, and – indeed – their teaching staff's unwillingness to work in some contexts.

Term ends on Saturday and we would normally have had Prize Giving, Speech Day, strawberries and champagne and the Sixth Form ball. Obviously, none of that is possible although we will be recording a short Speech Day event to mark the occasion. My Speech Day report to parents normally runs to anything from 45 minutes to an hour, but I will not be subjecting those looking at the recording to that epic on this occasion (although I will still have to write it!).

Next term remains a bit of a puzzle and a considerable challenge so far as planning is concerned. We have no idea at all what the government is finally going to say about schools come September: the noises are in favour of day pupils being able to return, but we cannot rely on that at this stage. While our international population is relatively low for this sort of school (18% of our total numbers) this year they are spread across 34 different countries so that is 34 different sets of potential travel restrictions to consider. If necessary – if the current quarantine rules are not relaxed in any way – we will be opening two weeks early to accommodate pupils who will then need to be quarantined before term starts.

Obviously, closer to home, I am very concerned for what I hope is a relatively small number of parents who will be seriously economically impacted by the pandemic and really worried for the education of their children therefore. The College has a long tradition of supporting families and I am sure the governors will do their best to rally round and provide as much support as possible where necessary in such cases.

In my last letter I made two personal points, one about Liverpool Football Club and waiting for the Championship to arrive and the other about my daughter being stuck in Los Angeles. As things stand my daughter is still locked down in Los Angeles, and Hollywood now – and for the foreseeable future – seems to be conducting all meetings about writing projects via Zoom and Teams, so she is still working on selling scripts, and can build on her first film appearing on US TV just before the pandemic hit. At least I can relax about Liverpool now!

As things stand we are planning that next year will be a normal year. It probably will not be, but we are not quite sure where the abnormalities will occur, but I hope that part of 'normal' will include Old Ellesmerian events and the opportunity to see as many of you as possible.

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Brendan Wignall