

1st October, 2021



Dear Parent/Carer

Parental update 73

Welcome to a fresh edition of our now fortnightly *Parental Update*. It's been an unusually busy week in the life of our school, and as ever there is much to share with you!

Black History Month

Today – October 1st – marks the start of Black History Month. It's an event we've always marked in school, but we're doing so more than ever this year. Why? Put simply, we believe that some communities' part in British history can all too easily be underplayed. Focussing on the particular contribution made by those from diverse origins is a way of ensuring that that contribution is not overlooked or distorted. In this way, Black History Month gives us all a chance to celebrate and understand the impact of black heritage and culture.

In this morning's reading Assemblies with Key Stage 3 students, Mrs Bell (Head of English) read an excerpt from *Still I Rise*, a particularly powerful poem by Maya Angelou:

You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

At the end of that reading, our Year 7s burst into spontaneous applause (which I can only recall happening once before in a St Margaret's Assembly). It was quite a moment!

As ever, I'd be really encouraged if you could discuss these issues at home with your son or daughter; asking if they remember their Assembly, or how they reacted to it, will help reinforce the messages that I'm sure we're all keen to impart.

Farewell and welcome!

Miss Camp (English) is leaving us today to begin her maternity leave; we wish her all the best for the excitement of the next few months. In her place, we welcome Miss Lawn, who will be taking Miss Camp's classes until her return.

Coincidentally, Mr Gibbons (Head of Year 9) has begun a period of paternity leave today. Again, I'm sure you'd want to join me in wishing him and his family peace and happiness as they adjust to new routines. Mr Jones (Deputy Head of Year 9) will be looking after Year 9 whilst Mr Gibbons is away. You can contact him through [this e-mail address](#).

Covid vaccinations

I am advised that the NHS Vaccination and Immunisation team will be onsite to deliver both the 'flu and the Covid vaccine on Thursday 7th October. Only students whose parents have consented will receive their 'jab(s)'.

Please note that St Margaret's is not involved in any of the administration for this programme; we are simply providing the team with access to our building.

Summer exams, 2022

You may have seen an announcement from Ofqual, the exams regulator, yesterday. The announcement is [here](#), and a good commentary about the most important points can be found in the *Tes* (a media outlet which used to be known as the *Times Education Supplement*) [here](#).

Since the introduction of the new-style GCSEs (graded 9 to 1, not A* to G), the number of higher grades awarded in each subject has effectively been 'rationed' to prevent grade inflation. (The technical term for this is that grades are now mainly *norm-referenced* not *criterion-referenced*). However, that system was suspended in 2020 and 2021 (due to the cancellation of exams), and the number of higher grades awarded increased significantly.

Ofqual has now said that the grades for GCSE (and 'A'-level) will return to pre-pandemic (*ie*, 2019 levels) in 2023; in 2022, grades will be pegged half-way in between 2021 and 2019. To quote the *Tes* article, this "*will mean that students will get higher grades in 2022 than those who sat exams in 2019 – before the pandemic – but that their grades will be lower than those seen in summer 2020 and 2021, when teacher-assessed grades were awarded.*"

The announcement also covered contingency plans (what will happen if exams can't take place this summer) and mitigations (what allowances will be made because of lost time due to Covid).

- If exams can't take place this summer, schools will be asked for Teacher-Assessed Grades again, and we've been advised to use Mock exams and coursework for such purposes. Given the Government's commitment to ensuring exams *do* take place this summer, it seems highly unlikely we'll be asked for Teacher Assessed Grades this year. If we are, though, I would want to reassure Year 11 families in particular that we will use the February Mock results, not the

November Mock results for that purpose; we would only use the November Mock results in exceptional circumstances – *eg* if, due to long-term absence, we had no other data for a student.

- In recognition of the fact that the current Year 11's preparation for these exams has been interrupted by the pandemic, Ofqual are going to make a further announcement on 7th February. In some subjects (*eg* English, History and Geography) this announcement will confirm what topics will come up in the summer; in other subjects it will confirm what the focus of each exam will be. We'll let you have more information about this in February.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about the arrangements for this summer, please don't hesitate to contact me through [the usual e-mail address](#).

Dr Silverstone writes...

"This week, I'd like to draw your attention to a streaming service called 'Twitch' that is becoming increasingly popular with young people. Twitch now has over 9 million active, daily users, and tends to be focused on live videos that are focused on online gaming. Most videos will show the streamer and the game that he or she is playing, and the gamer will provide a commentary on the gaming itself. There is also a function for viewers to leave comments and interact with the streamer.

"Parents and carers should be aware that, because videos on Twitch are streamed live, it's not possible for them to be fully filtered for inappropriate content, despite the fact that streamers are supposed to flag their streams as having mature content if that is the case. Furthermore, some of the games that are played in Twitch videos will not be appropriate for children and may contain graphic imagery. All games have an age rating, so it is quite possible for children to view games which are not suitable for people of their age.

"As always there are further issues if children choose to stream themselves – they must be careful not to divulge personal information and to consider that everything they put online is in the public domain and therefore out of their control.

"If any of you wish to discuss any concerns you have around online safety, please do get in touch with us at safeguarding@stmargaretsacademy.com."

Parental prayer group

One of last year's Year 7 parents set up a parental prayer group – a small group of parents who meet weekly to pray for our school. I'm deeply grateful for the time and energy these parents give; as a Christian, there's something uniquely powerful (and humbling) in knowing that other people are praying for you.

The group meet by Zoom at 2pm on a Monday. They're always open to new members joining them; if you'd like to find out more, please get in touch with Rebecca Cliff through [this e-mail address](#). Thank you!

Finally...

We'll be in touch again in a fortnight's time (Friday 15th October). In the meantime, I wish you and your family a restful early autumn weekend.

Yours faithfully
Stephen Brierley
Principal.

