



Beths Grammar School

an 11 – 18 selective school with academy status

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Dear Parents and Carers of boys in year 11,

Due to the dramatic and fast moving events of the past few days it is with a very heavy heart that we have been forced to close the school for the foreseeable future and we find ourselves in what I can only describe as astonishing times. These events have gripped the nation and have been very fast moving. The possibility of a school closure was always on the cards but I never thought that it would have happened so quickly and that the school year would come to such an abrupt end. With the outbreak of COVID-19, we as a school have followed the advice and direct instructions given to us by the Department of Education. Whilst there are many arguments for and against closing the school, it is important to note that this decision has been made on a national level and we are duty bound to follow all instructions by government, in the interests of public safety. I would like to mention that due to the unfortunate harsh ending of year 11 we are looking to formally mark the occasion with a celebratory event of some sort when the current level of risk starts to decrease. I had been preparing myself for the difficult task of handing the boys over to the sixth form team for September and so I can relate to their anger and frustration at the rawness of this sharp and unexpected ending.

Information was being filtered to the school from the DofE every morning on this matter. On Monday, we were told that the school would remain open and it would be “business as normal”. By Wednesday morning, we were told that school closures across England were imminent following the decision to close schools in Wales and Scotland. On Wednesday evening the Prime Minister made the statement that schools will close by Friday and that all GCSE and A-Level public exams would be “postponed”. By the Thursday morning we were then informed that all exams would now be cancelled. It was planned that we would say goodbye to all year groups on Friday, however with the pressures to maintain staffing levels and teacher-student ratios we were faced with the task of thinning down student numbers. At break time on Thursday I was told that we would start with dismissing year 11 students. This was the only option, as staff needed to use this time to stockpile students in other year groups with work as their studies would be continuing. I had a number of events planned for May, to celebrate the end of our time year 11, before they left for study leave. We had planned to take a whole year group photo to mark the end of our time together before welcoming new students in the sixth form. We were not even able to bring the year group together in the hall yesterday afternoon as this would have been considered a “mass gathering” and I am sure you will understand that we could not put the safety of students at risk. We dismissed them class by class and needless to say this was a very emotional time as the boys came to terms with the harsh reality of the current situation. I was able to speak to each group as they were being dismissed and I would consider this one of the most difficult jobs I have ever had to do since being their Head of Year. I understand that the boys found this very difficult and I am still coming to terms that boys left site on Thursday feeling devastated at what has just happened.

Over the past number of weeks the media has done a great job at speculating all sorts about the possible impact of the COVID-19 outbreak. There have been many a conflicting story, which has only caused greater anxiety amongst the students and staff. I suspect that there will be further speculation about what now actually happens with exam results. The prime minister made a number of blunt statements on Wednesday evening which only naturally prompts us to ask an extensive number of questions about the finer details. At this stage we are currently awaiting news and instructions from the DofE on how we proceed with getting boys results. The exact arrangements are currently unknown but the Headteacher will continue to keep you informed as and when we are made aware. We will also write to you about sixth form entry and how we continue to move forward.

These boys have worked exceptionally hard towards these exams. Their commitment to study has been superb and I have every confidence that if they had the opportunity to sit the exams we would have been looking at some truly exceptional results. Based on the last set of trial exams and predictions; we were on track to achieve our best ever GCSE exam results. This speaks volumes and is a testament to the hard work of the boys and the staff. However we will never know what this outcome would have been. As I said to the boys on their last day; whilst they have been unable to sit these exams they do however leave Beths with a different type of currency. So much success has happened over the past five years and this type of success cannot be measured solely through standard school performance measures or academic grades. I think it is important, at this rather difficult time that we reflect on the past five years and treasure the good times and the many successes achieved by every boy in the year group.

We promised you that when your son entered Beths in year 7 that we would “educate the whole child” and give him not only a solid academic provision but also the opportunities to develop his wider skills such as in sport, music, drama and the performing arts. I hope that we have been able to develop this promise and that the boys are able to look back with fond memories of their time in both Key Stage 3 and 4. I have watched with admiration their progression both academically and socially over the years. I would like to think that these five years have not been wasted and if anything your son has been able to learn from Beths the importance of hard work, self-discipline, resilience and determination. From their early days in year 7 to their last days in year 11, the energy and commitment these boys have shown has been exceptional. It has not always been a calm sailing for every boy and some boys do struggle more than others to engage with school. I would like to think that we have done what we can to support every boy in their hour of need.

I have thoroughly enjoyed our time together and I have enjoyed seeing them go from boys into young men. I have watched fondly from the side-lines the many football, rugby, tennis, basketball and volleyball matches. The atmosphere on the side-lines was always intense and I have to confess that these were always the best way to spend the afternoon after a busy day of teaching. I even deliberately used to re-arrange meetings to make sure I never missed the key matches against some of our rival Grammar schools! The skills they displayed on the sporting front, were always excellent and we truly have some exceptional sportsmen in the year group. If, for whatever reason I was unable to watch a match I was always quickly reprimanded by the boys with a “*where were you yesterday?*” the following day! It was not always about the winning that mattered. The boys always went out and did their best. The team approach that the boys adopted was always the best part. The way they would congratulate everyone in the team after a match was always a particularly pleasing sight.

We have also seen boys develop in music, drama and the performing arts. This is a particular strength of the school and I have watched with sheer pride, boys take part in our many music concerts and school productions. I have never missed a music concert since I started at Beths and I have always enjoyed watching the boys perform over the years and see their skill in music develop so strongly. At times I felt just as nervous as they did when they took to the stage for their first debut performance. Five years later these boys not only take centre stage but are the highlight of the evening. I loved how some boys had never played a musical instrument until they came to Beths. The school has played an important part in allowing boys to express their love of music and sport and provide them with the opportunity to turn dreams into reality. This does so much for their confidence and I hope that they continue their skills in these areas.

Today the entire school will be closed and the corridors and classrooms will fall silent for the foreseeable future until we get through this difficult stage. I shall miss the momentum of the build up to exams, the rough and tumble of lunch duty in the dining room, “doing my rounds” across the school site, but above all else, I shall miss talking to the boys about how things are going. They have been truly wonderful to work with. The best part of the school day was always making those visits to lessons

to see how their work was progressing, popping into the dining room or out on the field at lunch to gather the current state of mind and to provide those endless words of encouragement, congratulations and in some cases a telling off to one or two boys for their antics. However, I shall not miss the deadline for reports, HOY detentions, the extensive paper work and bus duty.

Boys – we have achieved so much over the past five years. Treasure these moments. We have endured (and survived) the notorious year 8 camp, cycled together, pushed each other off canoes, hiked the Kent and Sussex countryside on the Duke of Edinburgh scheme, visited Oxford university to help you realise that you can achieve the very best, sent you out on work experience to show case your employability skills and marched you into the exam hall to develop further your ability to take academic study seriously (without calculator cases obviously). Keeping order of 192 teenage boys has not been an easy task and as you know I have made it my business over the years to watch your every move. I am, however, realistic to know that many antics probably happened that I did not know about – not yet anyway. I really do hope that you reflect on everything I have said to you over the years. From the early days of “just do it” to “warriors at heart” we have always been working towards our long term goals. I hope you have taken from Beths the ability to realise that you have so many skills and talents. I have also encouraged you to use your skills and talents to the service of others in society. Educate yourself further so that one day you can play your part supporting the common good. Bottle up your commitment and dedication to study and be prepared to use this when you enter into the sixth form where it won’t be “grades 7-9” but instead the new Beths gold standard of “grades A to A*”. Gents – it has been a pleasure. Keep fighting the good fight, keep running your race and remember to “run so that you may win the prize”. Thank you for your kind words in my card – I particularly like your suggestion of renaming the school “McBeth’s Grammar School”!

And finally to you as parents, I cannot thank you enough for your endless support to the school over the past five years. You can never underestimate the power of your involvement in your son’s education. You have been my greatest asset in getting these boys to toe the line and study. You have suffered many a letter from me and endless reminders and information on key events. We look forward to this continuing as the boy’s progress into the sixth form. As all the research indicates, where parent-teacher-pupil links are strong, outcomes are fantastic and mutually beneficial all round. There are a number of boys who have already decided not the return to Beths and hope to move on to pastures new. We wish them well for their future educational journey. They will still be a Beths boy in our eyes.

As you know, I don’t do short letters, but this is the last. The school will be in contact with you to discuss further arrangements for sixth form and exam results over the next number of weeks. I am keeping you all in my thoughts and prayers during this difficult time and I hope we get through this as best as possible. As this marks the end of an era for year 11, a new dawn will approach soon when they return to sixth form.

Yours faithfully,



Mr R McBeth