

Orwell Park School 2019-20

Report for Annual Parish Meeting

The school has 288 pupils, though as I write only Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 are in school. Yesterday, pupils returned to the school site for the first time since 20th March and once again there was noise and fun being had on school field. 75 per cent of Year 6 are in school and non-attendance is due to a variety of reasons: anxiety on the part of parents, overseas pupils, medical reasons for example shielding of a family member. The Pre-Prep has seen many pupils return and I expect this number to grow in the coming weeks.

The school has been carefully arranged to allow for social distancing at all times, with all classes learning and playing as separate groups throughout the day. This is easier to achieve with the older pupils, but much time has been spent preparing for the phased return. We currently have seven Year 6 weekly boarders and this number may grow before the end of term.

This has been a challenging time for all schools, but the online school OPS Online running since the start of the Summer term has worked very successfully, with all teachers from Reception upwards teaching live Zoom lessons and many features of an OPS weekly routine retained, including recorded assemblies, pre-recorded Chapel from Ian Wilson, and games and activities at the end of the day. We retained Saturday school until half-term and this has now been suspended until the end of the academic year.

Pupils have been extremely motivated in the online environment and Years 6 to 8 are sitting exams this week, both at home and in school. Year 8 pupils have all been offered places at their senior schools, unconditional of Common Entrance, but many have chosen to sit CE, which will signify closure on their academic studies at Orwell Park.

Although until now all pupils have been learning remotely, a sense of community and connectedness has been maintained through events such as the annual Commemoration filmed in the orangery with contributions from myself, the Revd Canon Ian Wilson, a recorded sermon from The Revd Canon Dr Mike Harrison, Bishop of Dunwich and readings from the Head Boy, Head Girl and Senior Prefects.

As a school, we have contributed to the effort to combat Covid-19 by offering PPE to the NHS, looking after key workers' children throughout the holidays and offering our facilities to vulnerable children.

Trips and visits have been cancelled or postponed but in February, prior to lockdown, 23 members of Year 7 travelled to Mayo College in India as part of our link with that famous boarding school in Rajasthan. We hope to renew the exchange visits in 2021.

This year 23 of our Year 8 pupils have achieved 23 scholarships to a wide range of local and national day and boarding schools. Sport and music have been curtailed somewhat, including the cancellation of our Snape Concert in March, but the highlight of the Spring term was a superb performance of *Bugsy Malone* by our senior pupils.

In staff news, Jonnie Besley, Deputy Head Pastoral, leaves us at the end of this year to become Headmaster of Abberley Hall in Worcestershire. Nick Matthews, Head of DT, joined Gresham's Prep School at Easter and we wish him and his family every success in the future. Joe Earley, formerly Head of DT at Ipswich High, has made a very good start in unusual circumstances.

We will be unable to say our normal farewell to our departing Year 8 pupils this year, though we are planning to run speech day in some format at the end of the term. As we look forward in these uncertain times, there is an air of optimism with the return of pupils to the school, and we hope for a greater normality come September.

Adrian Brown
Headmaster
31/05/20