



# WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

17th July 2020

“History never looks like history when you are living through it.” – John W. Gardner

Dear Parents and Carers,

I have no doubt that the year 2020 will require an entire chapter in the history books. When future generations study, analyse and comment on what has happened to our economies, political systems and global connections, I hope they will also spend time considering what happened at home, in the family and the ‘classroom’. The speed and drama of the changes to how we live was breath-taking. I first mentioned the coronavirus pandemic in a newsletter on the 13th February and four newsletters later the school was closed to the majority of pupils.

It is hard to remember that the school year was passing with all of our traditional markers, before the disruption of the pandemic; there was a successful Open Evening, Harvest Festival, Community Christmas Party, concerts and services to commemorate the Holocaust and Armistice Day. We must also not forget the girls had been in rooms where they were taught by people who love their subject, and participating in societies where they pursued their passions for so many things from anime, to languages, poetry, the African Caribbean Society and Eco Club.

Girls had met global crises head on, campaigning against climate change and for greater access to mental health services and gender equality. They have continued to be engaged by national and international issues such as the Black Lives Matter campaign, and the quality of the debate I heard on Monday suggests they have spent much of their time wisely, informing themselves.

I believe the closure of the school has tested us all and brought out the best in many of us. Very sadly, we experienced bereavements and for some this was of close family and friends. I saw girls and staff reach out to provide comfort and many teachers undertook training during the holidays to learn how to provide the most appropriate support. Every week I was told about girls and staff who had raised money, made PPE, delivered food or made contact with isolated people and I have acknowledged some of them below. I hope the history books will also record the pupils and staff who sat on beds, sofas, on kitchen tables and even on the floor, with tablets, laptops and mobile phones to continue to teach and learn. This is a true testament of a school that has endured over 300 years and that, regardless of the circumstances, will keep student welfare and learning at its core.

I would like to thank all the parents who have sent messages of thanks to the staff for their work and those who have also given practical and financial support. Special mention must go to the parent who donated tablets and the family that gave their refunded money from Bude to help provide devices for girls who have been struggling to participate in remote education.

I am loath to call the academic year that will start in September, the 'new normal'. I think it is going to be Watford Girls learning, participating and being mindful of others. It may be different to other years but in my experience, every academic year is unique because your daughters are unique. Every year we have a new set of characters, with their own ideas, needs and talents and we will adjust to them. This is why we have two mottos: Sperate Parati (Go Forward with Preparation) and 'I can do it and I will do it'. We are prepared for next year and whatever happens, we will get through it, together.

## Highlights of the year

Work continued to **improve the school** site and accommodate the expanded year groups and to celebrate the joy of reading. Two laboratories that have been converted from classrooms, were finally ready to be used in October and new toilets were opened next to the Geography rooms. When the school closed, the Site Team used the opportunity to renovate the library, which has been funded by the Parents Association. I think it looks amazing!



Over the summer break we will be starting to build the third bridge that will connect North and South Sites; it will be finished by the end of September.

While it was possible, our girls went on **day and residential trips** both near and far. Physics students returned from space camp in Russia in August and then Cern, Switzerland in October. Geographers including me, visited the Amalfi Coast in Italy and then just managed to return from Swanage in Dorset with the Year 10 fieldtrip. The Modern Foreign Languages Department enjoyed a few days in Seville, Spain while the RS Department explored Amsterdam and New York.



Girls showed their **creative side in art, drama and music**. The Senior School production of 'Trojan Women' explored challenging themes' while the Lower School of 'Peter Pan' showcased not only the Year 7-9 girls acting but also the talents of the Sixth Form students who entirely reworked, cast, directed and produced the play. In a similar spirit, Anna Boichat and Rebecca Grant's love of musicals inspired their musical theatre showcase, 'Spotlight', which I am so pleased took place just before the school closed. Individual girls have also done incredibly well in their LAMDA exams, with 27 distinctions and 8 merit passes this year.

We were impressed by the quality of the music at the Christmas Concert and the carol services but Mrs Bridges went on to top that by taking a band of musicians to the Hertfordshire School Music Gala at the Royal Albert Hall.

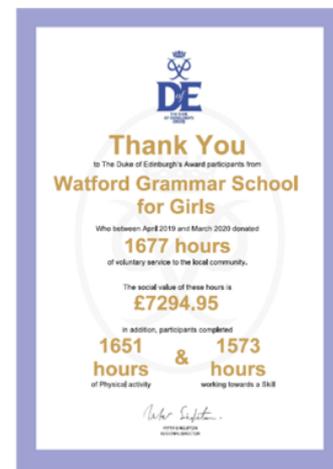


Emma McRae (Y12) was 'Highly Commended' in the South Centre Young Fashion Designer UK 2020 Competition. This was after the school closure so all her work was produced at home and submitted remotely. In sports the Senior Swimming Squad competed in the National Finals of the English Schools Medley relay and finished 24th. There was much energetic fundraising and community action and the school raised a total of £9754.74 this year, not accounting for money that went straight to the charities through Just Giving. Considering the shortened year, this is an impressive amount. Groups such as the Islamic Society held a charity week and raised £506.22, while all of Year 9 and the staff raised £1596.43 for the National Kidney Federation by taking part in Choctober and making 'Kidney' cakes in honour of Bob, Miss Bateson's transplanted organ.



Girls participating in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme have contributed over 1677 hours of voluntary service to the local community as can be seen by this certificate. The closure of the school did not stop the girls raising money with Virtual Fusion, raising an impressive £2200 for 'Raise' (West Hertfordshire Hospitals Charity).

Individual groups also raised money such as Jasmine Velani (Y12) who joined the group Makers4theNHS.com and has been helping to produce 350-400 visors per day to be used by frontline staff. Zahara Arif (Y12) has been a Medic Mentor for the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund. Sheena Parikha (Y8) has a sister who works in an NHS hospital in Kent so she baked brownies and cupcakes for the staff! Amara I (Y11) has been making headbands for the NHS with buttons on to which their masks can be attached and all the headbands have been sent to Watford General. Anjali Mehta called on local residents and collected food for the Watford Food Bank and the New Hope Trust. Finally, Abbie Guest (Y10) and Katherine Vandy (Y10) have raised over £1300 for the Rwandan Sisterhood.



Individual girls also had some amazing achievements this year:

- Abby Hire (Y10) Sailing RS Feva World Championships – Girls World Champions for 2019
- Reyna Jani (Y12) delivering Latin classes at Cassiobury Junior School
- Gemma McManus (Y10) won the West Herts Rotary Club Young Chef Competition
- Emily Nicolas (Y11) has been successful in gaining a seat in the National Youth Orchestra of Great Britain and the Hertfordshire County Youth Orchestra
- Amelia Young (Y12) along with her team mates from WBGs won the Goethe Institute German Debate National Final

# Recording their experiences during the school closure

For their last task in History this year, the girls were asked to upload an object to the website below, creating a virtual museum exhibit called the 'WGS Coronavirus Collection'. The idea is that the object is meant to be a reflection of their experience during the school's closure and something that future generations can look back on to find out more about what our students went through during this time period.

<https://padlet.com/athompson279/ovv7hxfgdclkhcn6>

At the moment, over 150 Year 7 and 8 students have contributed and Year 9 will be invited to do so tomorrow. There are lots of cute animals and delicious cakes but also many other fascinating objects/activities have been included. The Head of History has added his own, called 'Mr Thompson's Mouse Mat'. Please encourage your daughter to add her own objects to the virtual collection; she will have the link and the final collection will be added to the website for prosperity.

## A sad farewell to staff

It is always hard to say goodbye to staff but this year it is particularly sad. Robbed, like Year 11 and 13 of a proper farewell, this is especially hard for those who have worked in the school for so long. Three members of staff are retiring this month, with over 105 years of service to WGS between them. I would therefore like to say a fond farewell and happy retirement to **Mrs Jenny Smith**, who started in September 1984 as a new Religious Studies teacher and then was appointed as a Head of Year in 2008. She established and organised the Year 7 trip to Bude and many other trips such as the RS trip to Amsterdam. **Miss Sheila Conway** joined the school in September 1986 as Head of PE, since then she has been a long serving Head of Year, careers advisor and Biology teacher. Finally **Mrs Carmela Di Maria** who has been cleaning the school since 1985 and given great service to the school. **Mrs Jill Whittingham** is also retiring from teaching after 40 years, having spent 15 of those in our History Department. Thank you for your many years of support for the girls and staff; you leave behind a great legacy.

We are also sad to say farewell to **Miss Jessica Leonard**; Sociology teacher and Head of Social Sciences, she has decided not to return from maternity leave and is creating a new life in Kent. **Mrs Ayan Lowe** is leaving the English Department, and I wish her happiness at Parmiters' School and finally, we wish well to **Mrs Alison Page**, Biology teacher, **Mr Calvin Robinson**, Computing teacher, **Mrs Vic Hind** and **Mr Tim Bengner** from the SEND Department. Finally, **Mr Joel Burke** will be leaving the SEND Department and joining the Science Department.

I hope you have a good and restful summer and I look forward to seeing your daughters in September.

Best wishes,

Sylvia Tai