



Plymouth High School for Girls

"For life, not school, we learn"

16th September 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Usually at this time of year we would be welcoming you in to school to explain more about life in the Sixth Form and our expectations, as well as giving you an opportunity to meet the Tutors. Sadly, this year we are unable to host a meeting on site. Instead I have outlined key information in the attached booklet and hope very much that this will help us work together to enable each student to fulfil their potential.

It was with great pleasure that we saw the excited faces and happy chatter of the students starting their sixth form courses, and beginning the next, and very important, stage of their journey into the world beyond school. I was really pleased to see how well they settled in to their lessons, approaching the challenges positively and with enthusiasm. Unfortunately, Public Health England advised us to take the precautionary step of asking students to work from home for 14 days following one student's positive test, but distance does not diminish the effort the staff are putting in to setting quality work, which covers the specifications, on Google classroom. Please be reassured that while the Covid19 crisis poses problems for all, Plymouth High is well set up for good quality remote learning. The students have an online classroom for each subject and are expected to be logging into these for online lessons at the usual lesson time, as well as doing the extra study as required.

The three key qualities we emphasise to students in the Sixth Form are Responsibility, Independence and Ambition. Responsibility for their own learning, and independence in organising their time, and pursuing their studies. No longer do staff expect to chase or remind students. They are now young adults. These qualities are being very much tested, and developed, during this strange time of COVID and remote learning. So far, the students are successfully proving they are as responsible and independent as we expect them to be. Ambition is key to finding the drive to succeed; to having the determination to get through the difficult times as well as the good. It doesn't have to be an ambition to pursue a career, it can be the ambition to fulfil your potential, to do the very best you can – this is what we expect our Sixth Formers to aim for, and to work hard to achieve this.

A Level studies are challenging and students are expected to spend a considerable amount of time studying outside their lessons, we advise around 4 hours per subject per week outside of their lesson time. Alarm bells should ring if students say they have no homework – they are expected to use their initiative to do additional research. This is key to doing well, to avoid knowing and understanding only the

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minimum – the minimum is not good enough. Students have non-contact lesson time when they can study in free rooms, or the library. The common room is a place to relax but they need to develop the self-discipline to recognise that this is not something they should be doing every study period. Study at home is going to be allowed once students have shown they are developing successful work routines and habits. We are continuously reviewing home study in the light of the Covid19 situation.

Similarly, good attendance is vital. Research has shown a direct link between poor attendance and lower outcomes; a 10% drop in attendance has been shown to lead to attaining one grade less in the final exam. You should also be aware that when references are asked for, we are usually asked to comment on attendance. We do record and monitor attendance at online lessons. Time and again we see those who are willing to put in the time and effort, rewarded with the best grades.

It is possible to study, have a social life and a part-time job, but students need to prioritise what is important to them. Some students in recent years were working 14 hours per week and they struggled and did not reach their potential. Christmas is usually when students are asked to do extra work and my advice is 'don't do it' – a holiday should be just that – we all need time to relax and spend time with our families as well as doing the holiday homework! 8 hours per week paid work should be the maximum

I will be reminding students of what was said and emailed to them at the beginning of term – essentially all students are on trial for the first few weeks of their post-16 studies. We have predicted grades for students based on their suite of GCSE results. Teachers will shortly be commenting on the progress each student is making in each of their subjects in relation to these estimated grades and making recommendations as to whether they have displayed the appropriate attitude and aptitude to continue on the course or whether interventions or further guidance regarding post 16 study is needed. We have a zero-tolerance policy regarding homework in operation throughout the school that is there to instil into students the need to take on the responsibility for their own learning and organisation.

In addition, there is a whole new set of skills that are necessary for a good GCSE student to become a good post 16 student. These include:

- ✓ Time management
- ✓ Organisation of work – meeting deadlines (zero tolerance)
- ✓ Essay writing, including referencing;
- ✓ Communication skills – listening, contributing, note taking, detailing, giving presentations

- ✓ Researching and working independently; using their initiative to find and use a variety of resources – texts, books, internet, shared area.
- ✓ Teamwork
- ✓ Exam revision techniques
- ✓ Asking for guidance from subject staff and tutors

Developing these good study skills is supported by the work we do in Tutorial sessions.

During the next two years there are many opportunities for students to enrich their studies and their personal development; I have outlined these in the attached booklet. You can also expect a great deal of support from school – from an excellent tutor team, and Ms Mills, our highly experienced Sixth form Administrator and Mentor. We all have a genuine interest in the progress of each student, as well as their well-being. We are all available to give advice, and we also have specialist support from Ms Longford for Careers and Dr Van Es for UCAS applications. We also have a dedicated enrichment programme of tutorials and personal, social and health education to prepare them for life beyond school as young adults.

Our A level results continue to be strong with 80 of our 91 students securing places at university, including one at Oxford, one at Cambridge and many doing prestigious courses in medicine, law etc. There was a diverse range of courses undertaken by last year's students, some of whom chose to undertake apprenticeships and 3 joined the Armed Forces. Apprenticeships are increasingly competitive and valued by employers. The range of options available to students is vast and can be quite intimidating; our key aim is to equip students to be ready to take those decisions and build the portfolio of skills and qualifications to be successful in pursuing their ambitions.

We look forward to working with you and your daughter or son, so that they can have an enjoyable and rewarding time in the Sixth Form at Plymouth High.

Yours sincerely

C Eales-White

Claire Eales-White
Assistant Headteacher, Head of Sixth Form