



HM Briefing to KHPA AGM – Oct 2020

Good evening everyone. It is good to have the opportunity to meet albeit via Zoom. When I briefed the PA AGM for the first time last year, no one could have foreseen how our lives would be turned upside down in such a short space of time. Nor could we have envisaged how this period of upheaval and uncertainty would endure.

That word uncertainty pervades our world today.

The future is uncertain... but this uncertainty is at the very heart of human creativity.

Not my words but the words of Ilya Prigogine, the physical chemist and Nobel laureate.

But they are very apt in today's society. And very apt to our school. All of us have had to be creative over the past eight months. Creative in how we organise our lives. Creative in how we work. Creative in how we socialise. Creative in how we meet people – this meeting being a prime example.

Creativity has always been part of The King's Hospital School. We pride ourselves in how we approach education. The King's Hospital School does not just educate and nurtures talent: We take a holistic approach to the personal development of our students, encouraging them to step outside their comfort zone and build their confidence so that they can be the best version of themselves.

Over the past year, we have had to be resourceful and inventive in how we approach education. Emergency Remote Teaching was introduced to ensure we could continue with, and finish, the academic year.

Technology is a wonderful enabler, but it is just that, an enabler. We know that the positive conclusion of our academic year could not have been achieved without the commitment, dedication and resilience of our students and teachers – and also without the co-operation and support of you, the parents. Lockdown has been challenging for us all, but we are aware that people have been affected differently, whether it is caring for elderly relatives, having very young children at home, dealing with illness and loss, changes to working conditions, job loss. Even simple issues such as sharing the same space, sharing devices and wifi coverage have affected people in different ways.

Despite these challenges faced by parents, students and teachers alike, we adapted in ways we could not have previously imagined, supporting the students through a combination of; google classroom, pre-recorded lessons, live video classes for some of the students' timetable, to ensure that we continued to make progress through the curriculum.

The greatest pressure was on our Leaving Certificate students who had to cope with a large degree of disruption and uncertainty never before experienced. I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate them – first of all for their dedication and resilience in staying the course and secondly for their achievements.

A large number of students achieved 500 points or more, which accounted for 30% of the overall student cohort and 66% of our students achieved 400 points or more. This culminated in our average points increasing this year to 442.



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But it was a challenging time for this year's Leaving Certificate students and I'm conscious that not every student's experience was positive. However, of the students that received, what was considered to be, an unfair grade reduction, 13 were relieved to receive an upgrade in 1 subject after the error in coding was detected by the DES. For any students who opt to sit some of their subjects in November: I wish them well.

However, as you are all aware - The King's Hospital School has always been more than just a school – we are a community. Our interest in student welfare extends beyond the academic to include their personal and individual needs, development and well-being – a difficult ask during a lockdown in a pandemic but as a school we responded - recreating some of the end of year events that matter to students such as valedictory for Form 6. An extra-curricular timetable was established and executed with sporting videos, competitions, live music and drama lessons. Students got to take all their performing arts exams by recording them. Communication is key at a time like this and the school maintained contact with students through our wellbeing pathway - every student was spoken to by phone and we kept in touch and followed up with any students who may have been experiencing difficulties, even throughout the summer break.

Unfortunately, the autumn has not brought a respite from the pandemic for which many of us had hoped. As a society and as a school we have had to learn to live with Covid-19. And as we return to school in a world still scarred by Covid 19, the health, safety and well-being of our students, teachers and support staff is paramount.

Our staff worked throughout the summer to ensure that we could make the return to school as normal as possible for students in the current climate.

Extensive remedial work was carried out over the summer, including:

- the purchase of single seated desks
- the knocking of walls to create new and enlarged classroom spaces
- ordering additional seating outside which will provide a safe, mindful space for students and staff alike to retreat to if they need to take a break or catch their breath
- We have more than 150 hand sanitisers throughout the campus
- pedal pins to avoid hand contact
- no contact water dispensers
- locker rooms that are spread out
- All classes accommodated to have students 1m apart.
- One way traffic system to avoid unnecessary contact

On top of these physical improvements, we have devised a staggered timetable to allow for different start and finish times, break, lunch. We have additional staff in place to cover for absentees due to Covid-19 and dedicated teachers to liaise with students absent due to Covid-19.

A significant investment has been made, to provide every teacher with a Surface Pro device pre loaded with all the software and connectivity necessary for our school MIS and education programs. This forms part of our contingency planning, along with online timetables, should schools be forced to close again, at any point in the future.



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With Covid-19 dominating news reporting and public discourse, it is sometimes easy to forget many of the other issues our society faces. Last year I spoke to you about how the school's desire to be an inclusive and diverse community is a great strength; and that we should also engage beyond our School gates. The Black Lives Matter campaign in the United States and beyond highlighted the issue of racism in society. I think we must acknowledge that racism exists within Ireland and at times in our School, but I would like to briefly share what our school is doing to continue to foster a culture of inclusion and diversity.

- We are meeting with past students to hear about experiences and create a working group to inform strategies with current students,
- We are providing diversity training for staff and students,
- And we are engaging with the Anti-Bullying Centre, DCU, to initiate a research project with active engagement from our Students

And finally, on a positive note our student numbers are very favourable for 2020 and remained unchanged on 2019. Our current enrolment is 433 day students and 278 boarding students.

We were delighted to be able to accommodate our overseas students in a residential camp this summer ensuring their safety and that of staff and returning and new students.

All schools adopted a new admissions policy this year and our first-round offers for 2021 now take place at the later time of November 9th. The number of applications for Form 1 day and boarding places has been increasing year on year; and I am happy to report this year will be no different.

I am deeply grateful to and appreciative of Hilary and the Parent's Association for their challenge and support over the last 12 months; and for facilitating this meeting. It has given me the opportunity to bring you up to date on how our school has prepared and is preparing to make sure your children receive the best education and personal development in a safe and healthy environment.

Indeed, I am reminded of the words of civil rights activist Malcolm X who said: 'Education is the passport to the future, for tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today.'

You can rest assured that The King's Hospital School is doing everything to prepare your children for the next chapter in their lives.