

Queen Elizabeth's School

# The Elizabethan

NEWSLETTER TO PARENTS

AUTUMN 2020



**QE'S COVID CHRISTMAS:** Year 7 pupils, L-R, Louis Miller, Tuhin Mitra, Bobby Luke and Christopher Henry show their festive spirit at the end of an unprecedented Autumn Term during which everyone has worked together to keep the School running successfully.

## From the Headmaster

Dear Parents,

After a spring and summer spent largely in lockdown, I am pleased to report that this Autumn Term has felt much more normal. The majority of School life has taken place, albeit often in adapted form. Not only have our classrooms once again reverberated softly to the sounds of teaching and learning, but there has also been a welcome return to those in-person extra-curricular activities which could be run within our year-group bubbles. Alongside this, cross-bubble activities have taken place online, including our much-valued peer

mentoring system. I do not underestimate the magnitude of the changes many have had to contend with – to name just one example, it has been sad not to have had parents at the School, with parents' evenings taking place entirely online. But I can say that we have been fortunate in terms of the number of incidences of Covid-19 within the School. It has certainly been difficult at times, but, overall, I am thankful that we have not faced really significant disruption.

I was naturally delighted to read the highly laudatory report on Queen Elizabeth's School published recently

by the *Good Schools Guide*. The guide's Kate Hilpern began her research during lockdown and then visited us in October. Her final report commented on how we had "flexed quickly and well" to the challenge of Covid-19 and had "learned from it, too" in areas extending beyond the classroom, including pastoral care. That process has continued throughout the Autumn Term. The intelligent use of technology has enabled much more day-to-day normality. We have made extensive use of Microsoft Teams, which is now integrated well with eQE, bringing more functionality for teaching. It has also enabled those needing to isolate at home to participate in their lessons.



**GLITTERING SUCCESS:** GCSE results were exceptional, driven by a rise in the very highest grades.

We have seen some bold initiatives within the scope of the current restrictions. Our Year 9 Drama Club members rose magnificently to the challenge of staging an abridged version of *Hamlet* for this year's Shakespeare Schools Festival. Music, too, has adjusted well to the current dispensation, deploying web broadcasting and live-streaming to ensure that the term's concerts reached as wide an audience as possible. The *Good Schools Guide* mentioned our "intellectual approach to Art", noting the breadth of the forms and materials used, such as animation, installation, sculpture, and painting. While sports fixtures with other schools have not been possible, the PE department have been ensuring boys stay match-fit, organising intra-year group games and tournaments in rugby and water polo, for example.

In spite of all the new pandemic-related restrictions, the term got off to a very cheerful start as we continued to celebrate the GCSE and A-level grades awarded to our boys during August. All the things we were hoping for in the summer were realised. At GCSE, a shining performance at the very top, with 61% of all grades being at level 9, helped propel us towards what were ostensibly our best-ever results. It was a similar story at A-level, where our leavers achieved 99.6% A\*–B grades, as well as a 9.3% increase to 54.6% in the number of A-levels awarded an A\* grade; both figures represent a School record.

Given the cancellation of public examinations in 2020, comparing these awarded grades with previous years' results is difficult. But they are, by any measure, remarkable statistics, and I fully appreciate what an extraordinary amount of time and effort from colleagues, boys and families stands behind them. They are a vindication of our emphasis on free-thinking scholarship. As the *Good Schools Guide* put it in their summing-up: "[QE is] a place where boys can expect to get carried away with the collective will to learn both in and outside the classroom, the result of which is one of the most inspiring learning environments we've ever come across."

This month, Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced modifications to the arrangements for GCSE and A-level examinations and assessment next summer. Staff are staying fully abreast of these and will be ensuring that our senior boys are well-prepared for all contingencies as further details emerge in the New Year.

The end of term sees the retirement of Deputy Head Emi Aghdiran. Emi joined QE in 1998 and has made an outstanding contribution over many years. She was the School's first Business Manager and also our first female Assistant

Head, before her promotion to Deputy. Dynamic and visionary, yet with attention to detail, she has been a significant factor in the School's present success. On a personal note, I have found her hugely supportive and a pleasure to work with. Happily, she is by no means quitting the Elizabethan community entirely: she will remain a trustee of the School and of the Friends of Queen Elizabeth's. I wish her a happy retirement.

Work on our keenly awaited Music School continues apace. The foundation works have largely been completed, and the erecting of the steel frame should start this week. We remain on track for completion in time for the autumn of 2021.

I also eagerly anticipate the publication of our exciting new School Development Plan, covering the period 2021–2025, which was approved by the Governors last month. We look forward to sharing it with parents in January.

May I conclude by saying how impressed I have been at the resilience and good humour shown by so many in our Elizabethan family in the face of the unprecedented crisis which 2020 has brought us. For that, I thank you.

I extend my best wishes for a peaceful Christmas holiday and for health and happiness in the New Year.

**Neil Enright**  
**Headmaster**

*“extraordinary  
time and effort”*

*“flexed quickly  
and well”*



## Concerted effort keeps musical performance alive

Music staff turned to technology to maintain QE's tradition of performance during the pandemic.

The Senior Chamber Concert, the first major concert of the year, was video live-streamed on YouTube in a QE first. The 13 soloists performed a repertoire spanning the centuries, from Beethoven to electric guitar. The Intermediate Chamber Concert followed suit.

Then, with the normal November Concert ruled out, Director of Music Ruth Partington opted to make sound

recordings, bringing together socially-distanced ensembles who had been rehearsing in their year groups. The recordings were edited as a soundtrack with photographs, and broadcast as a YouTube Premiere. "We were determined to give our musicians a collective ensemble experience and an opportunity to perform." After that success, a similar format was adopted for the Christmas Concert.

## A new team at the top

Siddhant Kansal is QE's 2021 School Captain, supported by his Senior Vice-Captains, Sultan Khokhar and Paul Oforu.

The trio, all from Year 12, take over in January at the helm of a new team comprising: ten Vice-Captains; Captains and Deputy Captains for the six Houses, and more than 90 prefects.

Headmaster Neil Enright appointed the top team, handing them their Senior Prefect ties. "Siddhant is an excellent choice, with leadership skills that are readily apparent, combined with good humour, charisma, thoughtfulness and the ability to inspire," he said. "He brings great application to every task and I am sure he will discharge his duties with great distinction. I am confident that Sultan and Paul will provide great support. Sultan has a reputation for excellence, while Paul brings warmth and reflectiveness to the role."



## Music School milestones

Significant milestones in the Music School project marked both the start and the end of the Autumn Term. September brought the first 'concrete pour' – one of around 150 lorryloads needed for the £3.5m-plus project. And contractors were preparing to put up the steel frame as the term drew to a close.

# The play's the thing

## Why Shakespeare remains a key part of education at QE

When Queen Elizabeth's School was founded in 1573, William Shakespeare was still young, a teenager nearing the end of his own grammar-school education in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Nearly 450 years later, as QE cherishes its tradition and seeks to educate boys in accordance with its Elizabethan foundation, the histories and tragedies of the 'immortal bard' continue to speak afresh to each generation, a rich seam of both language and thought. Accordingly, the work of England's greatest writer regularly takes centre-stage at QE. It forms the focus of both lessons and extra-curricular activities.

Head of English Robert Hyland explains his department's approach: "Although in English we study Shakespeare from a literary and academic perspective, we can't read his work without remembering that it wasn't meant to be read, but performed. Performing Shakespeare allows pupils to think about the meanings of Shakespeare's language in new and creative ways."

The autumn sees the School's participation in the national Shakespeare Schools Festival. This year's abridged production of *Hamlet* by Year 9 Drama Club gave other boys in the year group bubble an opportunity to see live drama at a time when theatres across the country were closed.

Director Gavin Molloy, from QE's drama

support partners, RM Drama, says: "The boys collaborated brilliantly to tell this dark and tragic tale. Uday Dash worked very hard at portraying Hamlet as a sensitive, angry and complex character. Joel Swedensky, Rohan Kumar and Augie Bickers developed Polonius, Ophelia and Laertes very nicely, telling the story of a family torn apart. And full credit to Saim Khan for his scheming, nefarious Claudius."

*Hamlet* is certainly not the only recent Shakespeare activity, as Mr Hyland explains: "The Autumn Term is our 'Shakespeare term' in English – students from Year 8 up to Year 12 have been reading some of his greatest works, with *Othello* in Year 8, *Macbeth* in Year 9, *Romeo and Juliet* in Year 11, and *Hamlet* in Year 12."

Within their English class, Mr Hyland's pupils recited speeches by Iago, a villainous character in *Othello*. "By asking students to perform, we are asking them to think about Shakespeare's language choices in a different way – every choice of volume, tone, pitch and pace has to be justified by the text. Before performing, we watched professional actor Rory Kinnear performing the same speech in

a recent National Theatre version of the play." The boys gave each other feedback, while Assistant Head (Pupil Involvement) Crispin Bonham-Carter, a former TV & film actor and theatre director, visited to give his observations.

Enrichment activities include the English-Speaking Union's *National Shakespeare Competition*. All Year 8 boys have been asked to learn a Shakespeare speech and recite it by heart. The best will enter the regional round in February, and hopefully proceed to the national finals, Mr Hyland explains. "We have given students samples from a broad range of plays and reflecting a wide range of emotions."

And the Monday-lunchtime Shakespeare film club is

finding an appreciative audience.

"Every week has seen numbers growing,

and it has sparked lots of enthusiastic discussion – for example, how good a leader is King Henry V, and what do we think of the treatment of women in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?"

*"New and creative"*

*"Dark and tragic tale"*



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## From the archives: a different global cataclysm, another kind of struggle, but the same QE resilience



In the uneasy early months of World War II, with Barnet neither evacuated nor officially categorised as safe, staff and pupils carried on as best they could. Sandbags were brought in, shelters dug and, with the black-out in force, timetables changed to allow boys to get home before dark. In short, just as in the current Covid-19 crisis, while adjustments were made to meet the exigencies of an unprecedented situation, all were determined that education at QE should continue.

to get boys back to classes as quickly as possible. Seven explosives hit QE in the Luftwaffe's evening air raid. Most fell quite harmlessly, but two caused real damage. The



Even when the bombs did finally come, on Saturday 11th January 1941, the response was simply a stoical determination

refectory was demolished, its contents, which included irreplaceable oil paintings and large photographs on the

walls, destroyed. The other bomb severely damaged a chemistry laboratory and craft room. Nobody was injured.

Headmaster Ernest Jenkins' letter to parents, penned on the Sunday, is a masterpiece of conciseness and understatement. Before telling them that the start of the Spring Term, scheduled for the Tuesday, was postponed, he writes, without elaborating, that: "There has been some damage to the school." In an interview with *The Barnet Press*, Jenkins is more voluble, lamenting the loss of the paintings and photos, and explaining wryly that he "would have borne with less

disappointment a direct hit on the gymnasium", with its "unsatisfactory floor".

Short as his letter is, the Headmaster (1930-1961) devotes a sentence to drafting in help to deal with the raid's aftermath: "...I should be glad if boys in the VIth and former Upper V would report in old clothes on Tuesday next, the 14th, at 9.45 by the Senior Entrance." In his forthcoming history of QE, Dr John Marincowitz, Headmaster (1999-2011), records that School resumed for all pupils within ten days and that the Board of Education repaired the damaged wing by August 1941.

### Mathematics successes galore!

Year 10 and 11 mentors to the Élite Maths (Junior) group helped younger boys to great success in the 2019-2020 Junior Mathematical Challenge, reports Assistant Head of Mathematics Wendy Fung. Of the 384 boys invited to enter, 83% won a gold, silver or bronze certificate. Three – Hisham Khan, now in Year 8, and Jothusan Jeevakaran and Saim Kahn, both of Year 9 – achieved perfect scores.



### Economics across the ages

Year 13's Ayushman Mukherjee took second place in the Institute of Economic Affairs Dorian Fisher Memorial Prize essay contest. He examined the role of institutions in economic development, featuring the 1381 Peasants' Revolt and 1688 Glorious Revolution.



### Stopping the plastic plague

Year 11's Ashwin Sridhar, Anish Rana and Merwan Singh won third place in the British International Education Association's International STEM Innovation Challenge with an AI-controlled hovercraft design (pictured) to tackle plastic waste.



## *Climate warrior*

QE has joined the London Schools Eco Network, with Year 12's Aadarsh Khimasia tackling climate change as the School's delegate at the online Youth Climate Summit. He appealed to business and government representatives at the Sustainable Innovation Forum and was interviewed by Sky TV.



## Raising awareness through Perspective

Two old boys returned to the School on International Men's Day to speak about their experiences as members of the LGBTQ+ community, while another joined senior staff and pupils in marking Black History Month.

## Careers for a changing world

QE's annual Year 11 Careers Convention moved online – the centrepiece of an adapted careers programme for senior pupils. In six video sessions, boys heard speakers on topics from entrepreneurship to cyber-technology. Assistant Head Sarah Westcott said: "The Covid crisis has highlighted the fragile nature of some employment sectors, and it is important we equip students with all the skills they will need in the future."

Both events took place under the auspices of Perspective, the pupil-led initiative launched earlier this year.

Jamie Sherman (OE 2002–2009) and Arjun Goswami (2001–2008) spoke to senior prefects, including the Equality, Diversion & Inclusion Ambassadors, and were live-streamed into Year 9–13 tutor rooms. They reflected on how the law and attitudes had changed. Jamie is an Associate with a legal firm, who identifies as gay. Arjun, who is pursuing a doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Manchester University, identifies as pansexual.

During Black History Month, School Vice-Captains Thomas Mgbor and Ayodimeji Ojelade, of Year 13, spoke in assemblies, while teachers uploaded resources to eQE and led assemblies. Ifeanyi Chinweze (2008–2015), recorded films for older and younger boys recounting discriminatory comments against him as a teenager. "It's important to understand that racism is not limited to hate crimes or acts of violence," he said. The Headmaster praised Perspective's work, adding that QE's forthcoming curriculum review will incorporate themes of combatting racial bias.

**BACK IN ACTION!** The CCF resumed training this term, with a new competition-based programme within year group bubbles that was specially adapted to keep cadets safe from Covid-19.



## Tournament is QE first

Aahan Shah, of Year 7, took all five of his games to win QE's inaugural whole-school chess tournament. The online weekend event attracted 76 boys. Praising pupils for the high turnout, Teacher in charge of chess, Geoff Roberts, added: "I'm particularly delighted with the performance of the younger students, which shows a bright future for chess here."



## Phenomenal!

Nine sixth-formers performed so strongly in the Senior UK Maths Challenge that they qualified for the British Mathematical Olympiad, including Year 13's James Tan, who was *Best in School*, scoring 125 out of 125. Assistant Head of Mathematics Wendy Fung said: "James has scored perfect, or near-perfect, marks in every Maths Challenge he has sat, from Year 7 to Year 13. He has done phenomenally well and is so unassuming about his successes."

## Maintaining an edge

With Covid-19 forcing the cancellation of all fixtures with other schools and severely restricting physical contact in sports, PE teachers came up with a creative game plan for the Autumn Term.

Director of Sport Jonathan Hart said: "We have endeavoured to run a programme that allows pupils to be physically active and to have competitive opportunities, whilst working within the national guidelines." In rugby, the focus was on developing non-contact core skills and increasing boys' decision-

making and tactics, with each year group having a tournament on Saturday mornings over the first half-term. Some boys in Years 7-10 were invited to position-specific rugby workshops.

For water polo, year groups played intra-school fixtures on Tuesday afternoons.

## Master Minds triumph!

Year 7 teams battled it out in a lively quiz while learning about QE's long-running Sai School Appeal. Pupils raise funds every year to support the rural school in Kerala, India. The contest, which raised £139, was organised by appeal President, Year 13's Tashane Akarawita. The Master Minds – Shreyas Iyengar, Oscar Kaltenbronn, Tunishq Mitra and Vyom Srivastava – emerged victorious.



Queen  
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School

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Photography: eleanorbentall.com  
Content & Design: edge-media.co.uk

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