

19<sup>th</sup> December 2022

Dear parents/carers,

**Re: End of term update**

I hope you and your families are well. This letter gives you a few important updates about the end of term and start of next. Additionally, at the end of a long term, we thought it would be nice to put together a few highlights from some of the many great things that have been going on in school over the past term. Therefore, please find this attached at the end of this letter and I hope you enjoy reading through it.

**Christmas holidays and return date**

As we have already communicated, school finishes for students at 12.30pm tomorrow, Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> December. For those who use school buses, service will run as usual but just at this earlier time. There are no detentions for Tuesday and there will not be a late bus service.

The Christmas holidays are the perfect opportunity for everyone in our community to get some rest, recuperate and spend time with family. To that end, we will be closing the school site entirely over the festive period and emails/communications will be checked for emergencies only.

Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> and Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> January are both Inset Days. Staff will be in school on both days but undertaking important training to help us constantly improve what we offer at JOG. **School resumes for students on Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2023 at 8.45am.** Please ensure that your child attends school on time, ready to learn and do their best as usual. The holidays are the perfect time to ensure that any items of uniform that need replacing are purchased so that your child can also attend in the full correct uniform as per our policy. If you want to help your green credentials as well as save some money, we do have a supply of second-hand uniform available through our PSA. If you would like more information, please email [jog.2ndhanduniform@gmail.com](mailto:jog.2ndhanduniform@gmail.com).

**Staffing**

We are saying goodbye to three members of staff at the end of this term. Mrs White our teacher of Food Technology, Mr Lewis our Faculty Leader for Maths and Miss Kuczko-Roy one of our Teaching Assistants are all off to pastures new with our best wishes. Recruitment is very tough for schools at present and we are working hard to find permanent replacements for our two departing teachers and have been fortunate to fill the post left in the TA team already.

Finally, I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to every one of you for your support over the last term. I am immensely proud to be part of JOG and our brilliant community. I wish you and your families a peaceful Christmas and fantastic New Year.

Yours sincerely,



**Mr R Hawthorne**  
Head of School

## A few highlights from the term

I asked staff to send me a few examples of the many positive things that have happened over the Autumn Term, so I could share with you just some of the brilliant things our students participate in and benefit from at JOG. The examples below are by no means exhaustive and there are many more we could have included, but I hope that you enjoy finding out a little bit more of the many enriching experiences and heart-warming things that your children are involved in.

This term in **Drama**, Year 7 have been exploring the wonderful world of the Arabian Nights stories. They were challenged with creating their own version of one of the famous stories which they performed for their classes. Year 8 have developed their comedic skills with some work on Silent movies and physical comedy, their performances were hilarious, and we definitely have some fantastic actors in Year 8! Year 9 have worked so hard towards their performances of 'Blood Brothers', a challenging text with some difficult themes but they have risen to the challenge and performed duologues from this famous play. Next term we will be starting a weekly Drama club so students should keep a look out for posters around school!

From the **English department**, Miss Clarkson was keen to mention the Year 7 and 8 students who had their **poems selected by 'Young Writers' for publication** in 'The Power of Poetry- Speak Out'. Ruby, Sophie, Lexie, David, Anna, Freya, Freya (that's not a typo – there were two of them!) and Alice should all be “super-proud of themselves on such a brilliant achievement” so Mrs Clarkson told me. I couldn't agree more.

Mrs Grearson wanted to highlight what a fantastic time has been had in the **Music department** this year so far. She informs me that the Keyboard Club has grown in popularity and the students have been busy working on assessment pieces, Christmas music and much, much more. The newly formed JOG Chamber Choir has been busy preparing for the Christmas Carol concert, and they performed beautifully along with some amazing soloists. Mrs Grearson said “I was so proud of them all and can't wait for more performing opportunities in 2023. Well done everyone.” As all great Music teachers do, she couldn't resist a plug either and went on to say “If you're interested in joining Keyboard Club or the Chamber Choir, please speak to Mrs Grearson.” Please do pass that on at home!

Our **Welfare Team** work alongside so many of our students, but wanted to highlight their work with a few in particular. They told me “We have supported 16 students with their wellbeing by providing a counselling service within school and 9 students have had ELSA support. We have worked with some wonderful students in Year 11 who have created their own revision group during their lunch breaks, and our Student Leadership Group for mental health have been proactive in setting up meetings for projects for next year.” A brilliant example of the many things we can celebrate in pastoral care.

**The Library** has been busier than ever, according to Mrs Chester, with lots of Y7s swelling our numbers in lunchtime clubs. Eco Club (Friday lunchtimes in the New Year) is up and running again, building on our Committee's 'Green Flag Award' success from last year. Book and Biscuit Club has been a roaring success, and students have enjoyed opening boxes of brand new, exciting, on trend and diverse new books. The 'Rookery Writers' have been plotting for The New Year and we've re-introduced 'Tranquil Tuesdays' for a quieter day in the week. Our Student Librarians have been very active, too, curating a new 'Crime' section, a 'Leadership Shelf' and a 'Shelf Help' corner, writing reviews and creating a 'Positive Vibes Board' among other things. And we've so much planned for next year! “Thank you, as always, for your support” the ever-positive Mrs Chester asked me to convey!

Our indefatigable Progress Leader for Year 7, Miss Harris was keen to use an opportunity to tell me about how proud she is of Year 7 this term. “Year 7s have settled brilliantly this year” she told me,

“They have engaged in lots of exciting opportunities from putting on lunch and games for our elderly community, to winning many local football matches and performing Christmas Carols at the local church. They have worked so hard, had fantastic feedback from staff and visitors and been an absolute credit to our school. We are very excited to see their successes in the new year!” There are more details of the ‘All Aboard’ initiative and Carol Service below (and on Twitter too), but I know Miss Harris would want me to accentuate the positives more than once!

Mr Smith wanted to highlight that more than 360 of our students participated in our ‘**Edurio**’ survey, paid for by Excalibur Academies Trust and aimed at finding our student views on a range of topics that impact them in school, including pastoral care and safeguarding. “It’s always important to gather the views of as many of our students as we can, and in a variety of ways too.” Mr Smith told me. “We do a lot of student voice activities in school, but this survey provides insight that we can compare with national benchmarking too, so it provides a different perspective”. We’ll have the results early in Spring and will be sharing our next steps with students and parents in due course.

In **PE** Mr McKeivitt tells me that it has been a fantastic two terms in the department. The enthusiasm for extra-curricular sport has carried on from last year and the new Year 7s have also embraced all aspects of secondary school PE. By all accounts it has been a busy few months with both boys’ and girls’ football fixtures, badminton tournaments, basketball festivals and handball games. Mr McKeivitt told me “It has been fantastic to see so many students willing to represent the school across a number of different sports. A big shout out must go to the Year 7 and 8 girls’ football team who made it to the third round of the national cup. They came up against schools who had far more students on roll than we have, but that didn’t stop them!” We are looking forward to another action-packed fixture calendar next term, with football, netball, badminton and table tennis matches all scheduled.

There have been so many **events during the long term** that it’s sometimes hard to keep up with it all! I therefore enlisted the help of our community champion, Ms Arden-Hunt to help me put together the following few highlights:

There were a number of **careers** events over the term. For example, in September, Year 11 participated in a Careers Day which involved each student having an interview with a local business professional – companies had volunteered staff to give each student a 30-minute interview experience which is invaluable in preparation for their post 16 choices, whether they are going on to local Sixth Forms, Colleges or apprenticeships. The feedback is also invaluable for helping with their CVs too. They also got to interview for various job professions in a ‘Speed Dating’ style interview to find out who did which job, which was very entertaining as well as informative. We finished this day with a ‘Dragons Den’ challenge to create a Golf Hole for their own crazy golf course!

Year 11s also enjoyed a ‘Careers Expo’ at Newbury College of both local and national careers and trying hands on challenges to test themselves. Students came away with a variety of information and ideas that will help them make their Post 16 choices.

**Open Evening** and the two mornings that followed were a roaring success once again. Whilst staff worked really hard to prepare the school, and prepared it was, I have always believed that it’s the students who tell prospective parents the most about a school. It was very pleasing therefore, to have so many students volunteer to help in Faculty Areas, offer tours to visiting parents and their children and, in the case of Caitlin in Year 11 and Harry in Year 10, write and deliver a speech giving their impressions of the school (unedited by me I have to say too!). Whilst of course, it’s great to see the students serve their school with pride, I also enjoy seeing them develop and grow some essential life



skills, through the roles they undertake on the night too. Attendance to the evening was at a record high and every indication we have, points to another year where our numbers should grow; a sure sign of our well-deserved positive reputation in the local community.

There were also numerous **trips** over the term, with some of them being those that were delayed from summer due to the unprecedented heatwave. One of these was to London Dungeons and London Eye. Ms Arden-Hunt told me “About 70 students enjoyed their delayed trip to London, and we were scared witless at the dungeons, as well as having teachers put in the stocks, and in jail. The Eye ‘flight’ was absolutely beautiful as we saw the London skyline which was extremely picturesque, and awesomely stunning!”

Other delayed trips that ran the same day, gave students in Years 8 to 11 the opportunity to experience everything from the thrill-rides at Thorpe Park, to bowling, paddle boarding, laser tag and even foot golf. Whilst they were away, Year 7 students spent the day working on a careers project where they invented a new type of chocolate bar, and having seen many of their ideas, I can safely say that our confectionary industry is in very good hands in the future, although our waistlines may not be so lucky! Having watched them go at the end of the day, and see each of the trips return safely, it was a brilliant but tiring day all-round. As one student told me “These trips are great sir, but next time I might need a day off to recover!”

Whenever Mr McKeivitt has led a trip to see a national sporting team play, they have won, so this term it was the turn of the England Men’s rugby team to benefit from the ‘Midas touch’ that either he or our students (most likely the latter!) provide. England secured a convincing win over Japan at Twickenham with their presence. Hopefully it will rub-off when the World Cup starts next year, although I’m not sure a trip to France will be on the cards!

Year 11 enjoyed **fundraising** for their **OAP Christmas Party**. This included several Tombolas which proved to be extremely popular, along with our Annual Christmas Fair where the penalty shootout proved a winner with the students, along with freshly baked popcorn, and ‘fish for a coke’, amongst lots of other side stalls. This was a record-breaking fundraising event, and with the tombola made in excess of £350!

The Year 11 OAP Christmas Party itself was a great success, and 76 senior citizens from the local community enjoyed a full Christmas dinner and all the trimmings, served by a group of Year 11 students. They were ably entertained by two rounds of Bingo to win some luxury hampers, and the singing of carols with both staff and students. They ended with a grand raffle, and were thanked by both the Constable and Mayor, along with thanks from the Head. The students raised over £1000 for this event, which is incredible as I’m sure you’ll agree.

On Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> December our Key stage 3 students experienced the **Annual JOG Carol Assembly** where Reverend Saunders told us a story about Jesus’ birth, and this was interspersed with bible readings about the Nativity, and two beautiful musical items from Year 8; ‘Snowman’ sung by Lacie Fisher and the JOG Chamber Choir singing beautifully too. Although it was many years ago now, I still remember the fear of getting up in front of my peers at an assembly, so my full respect goes to the students involved for being brave enough to do this at JOG!

Over the course of the Autumn Term, our Year 7s have been entertaining one of our community groups called ‘**All Aboard**’, by serving them a two-course meal, and then retiring to the library to play

board games and just chat. I'm sure you'll agree that this is a great community initiative and I think that students enjoy doing them as much as our community attendees.

As part of our local community, John O' Gaunt school likes to support local events, and two Year 11 students represented the school by laying a wreath at the **Hungerford Remembrance Day Parade** in November, and also reading at the **Mayors Carol Concert** in December.

As part of our community spirit, we as a school decided to support **Newbury Soup Kitchen** this Christmas to help those less fortunate than us, and they will be picking our contributions up before Christmas so that their clients may enjoy some hot food and Christmas cheer.

Of course, the term was also punctuated with the sad news of the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth. However, the response of our students was a highlight in itself, albeit a poignant one. Students were invited to write an entry in a 'Book of Condolence' organised by Ms Arden-Hunt which we will send on to the Palace. Reading through the genuine and sensitive comments was not only moving but also provided me with such a deep sense of pride. Students from across year groups showed once again, why the JOG community is so amazing.

Finally, on behalf of all the staff at John O'Gaunt, I wish everyone in our community a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

