



December 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I'm absolutely delighted to be able to introduce myself to you as the new Head at The Castle Rock School. I start officially in January but it has been very helpful to have visited a number of times already and to get to know the school beforehand.

This year teachers and school leaders across the country – the whole world in fact – have had to adapt to unprecedented and extraordinary circumstances, trying their best to protect everyone whilst keeping learning going for their students. I'd like to pay tribute to the staff at The Castle Rock School who have done their utmost to support our pupils, to parents who have had to organise your learning at home and to the children themselves. This has been a bewildering time for them and they have needed to show great resilience for many months. I'd like to give my particular thanks to Mr Gamble who has been leading the school over that time; I'm fortunate indeed that he will be working with me as one of my deputies alongside Ms Booth and Mr Rowbottom.

The announcement of the introduction of a vaccine for Covid-19 has given us all hope. Although we can now see light at the end of the tunnel, there will undoubtedly be continued incidents in 2021 when we will need to ask students and staff to self-isolate to continue to protect our community. However, it is right that we make plans to move to a more normal school environment, so I am pleased to let you know that we have been working to bring back a more conventional timetable from next term. We will still need to take care to maintain 'bubbles', so students will continue to take breaks separately in their year groups. They will now move around the school but must wear masks as they do so. We also need students to take responsibility for putting masks back on and sanitising the desks they have been using at the end of each lesson and to ensure they follow the directions of their teachers at lesson changeover times. I know we are all looking forward to gradually getting back to a normal school environment.

It's a further tribute to our staff that they have worked through the merger of two separate schools to form our new school during this difficult time. We now need to focus on making The Castle Rock School a wonderful place to learn, taking the best from each school. I've been discussing priorities for the next stage, and I would like to share these with you:

- We need to do all we can to support students taking exams in 2021. I've asked for the school to introduce a learning platform called GCSEPod which students can use to assist their revision. It's very popular in schools around the country and your child will be able to use GCSEPod on their smartphone, tablet or computer at home to access a huge range of materials and quizzes. Our staff will be introducing this as part of their teaching and homework starting with Years 11 and 10 but younger pupils have access too and they are very welcome to explore it. Please discuss this with your child. This will be particularly useful to students in Year 11 thinking through their sixth form choices and in Year 9 who will soon need to make their GCSE options. If there are any issues with being able to access these materials at home, please let us know.
- We need to re-establish the very highest standards of behaviour. Staff will be explaining a clear set of expectations to pupils about behaviour in lessons and the consequences of not meeting those standards. However, I want to be able to spend a great deal of my time congratulating pupils on doing so well and having a reward system which will keep you informed about the great things your child is achieving. As the father of a child who has just started Year 7, I completely understand that we need to communicate your

child's achievements to you regularly. We are working hard to get a new app in place for you which we will use for communications as soon as we can in the new year.

- I've asked staff to introduce a clear assessment system which will let students and their parents know how they are achieving compared to other pupils in the school in each subject. Alongside that, teachers will report on how your child approaches their lessons, including their preparation, commitment to lessons, ability to work with other pupils and how they are engaging with homework or coursework for their qualifications. We will be using this system for the first time next term.

I'm really looking forward to getting to know our students and to meeting many of you in the new year. In the meantime, I wish you all a very restful, safe Christmas.

Duncan Baldwin



Head of School
The Castle Rock School