15 June 2020

Dear Year 7 students, parents and carers,

I hope this message finds you all safe and well. We have now entered our tenth week of remote learning and our twelfth week of lockdown *(that's nearly three months!).*

**This week Walthamstow School for Girls will open its doors and welcome back around 100 students from Year 10 for the first time since March.** This is the clearest sign yet that life is beginning to return to normal. Although '*normal*' comes with the caveat that normal may not be the same as it was before Easter for a long long time. Following government guidelines, we have introduced several changes to the school designed to make you safer. As the Year 10s will find out this week these include: one-way systems, hand washing/sanitising stations, fewer desks in each classroom and staggered start times. **These changes are all designed to minimise the chance of infection from Covid-19 and keep both staff and students safe at all times**. This is the first step in what will undoubtedly be a long process in getting school (and indeed society) back to where it was before the Coronavirus outbreak. It will probably take a quite a while for that to happen, at times it will be challenging and frustrating, but the important thing is that we do it right.

One day it will be the turn of Year 7 to return to school and see the *new normal*, until then we ask you to **stay vigilant and keep learning at home** (as you have been doing so thus far).

This past week also saw continued protests in support of the Black Lives Matter movement and the inevitable backlash from counter protestors (particularly in London at the weekend). **There has been a particular focus in the past week on statues and monuments across the UK that celebrate the achievements of men who made their money from the slave trade.**On Wednesday protestors tore down a statue of former slave trader Edward Colston and threw it into a Bristol harbour, while councils in other areas chose to remove problematic statues in order to avoid future controversy.

As a history teacher I am aware of the perceived importance of statues to represent individuals of great historical significance. **While many statues across the world are positive powerful reminders of the past, others were controversial when they were put up and may be actively offensive to others today.**The act of putting up a statue is a powerful statement of your values, just as pulling one down is. For those who say we need statues to teach us history I would recommend they pick up a book, attend a museum or pay attention in school to learn about the past.

**The moment we are living through at the moment is truly historic.**So far in 2020 we have left the EU, seen a worldwide pandemic, a financial crisis, a national lockdown, school closures, the Black Lives Matter protests, statues torn down, counter protests.... and **we're not even halfway through the year yet!**I feel sorry for students in the future who have to study the year 2020, as there has been enough news in the first half of this year to fill a library!

If you do want to know more about the issues surrounding whether or not to remove statues, or the Black Lives Matter movement or Britain’s Colonial Past then I would encourage you to read. **But don't just rely on one source for your information, find several websites, books, articles, podcasts, documentaries etc. and try to understand the issues from several perspectives and make up your own mind.**

Remember while it is true that: *'Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it'* (George Santayana), it is also true that *'A people without the knowledge of their past history, origin and culture is like a tree without roots'*(Marcus Garvey). So, if you are interested in what is going on in British society at the moment, I would actively encourage you to find out for yourself what the facts are.

**Once again, I hope these protests and counter protests can spark a national conversation about who we are and more importantly who we want to be. They can be a historic moment of positive change for our generation when the world changed for the better, or they could be looked on as a missed opportunity.** If you would like to know more then I suggest you read through the information on The Day: <https://theday.co.uk/stories/pressure-mounts-to-decolonise-the-curriculum>

I hope you have managed to slip back into your weekly work routine. **Please remember that if you have subject specific questions or need any help with your assignments, please use the Team chat to ask your teacher.** If you have any general school issues or you are having problems with Teams, please contact us at info@wsfg.waltham.sch.uk  Just a reminder you should be spending **no more than three hours completing schoolwork each day** and approximately **one hour on each subject.** Don't worry if you don't complete every single piece of work every week, just let your subject teacher know that you didn't have time to finish it.

Remember to**set your alarms** for 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday and Friday so you are registering on time this week. I will pose another challenge for you to have a go at before your next tutor time on Wednesday.  **Please encourage any of your friends who forgot about it to join in this week as it is very important that everyone stays connected.**

Just a reminder, **you should all be reading and completing your quizzes for Accelerated Reader.** While some of you have used this time away from school as a great excuse to really dive into the books you love, others have sadly neglected their reading. Do try to make time each day to read a book or magazine (or something not on a screen!). Not only is it relaxing and fun, it will also help with your wellbeing and you might even learn something along the way.

**As more and more shops open up it is especially important to stay alert as the risk of coming into contact with someone who may have the Coronavirus increases every time you come into contact with someone. So please try to ensure that you not only look after yourselves at this time, but you also look after each other**. Continue to follow the same practices that you should have been taking all this time (wear a face mask, wash your hands, try not to make unnecessary journeys).

Every week we are setting you tasks to do that I'm sure are taking up a lot of your time, but don't forget to make time for yourself as well. Don't spend all your time working, you need to take regular breaks, exercise and have fun too.

Once again, I remain hopeful that we will see you again before we are due to break up for the summer holidays, but school will only remain open when it is safe to do so.

Until then stay safe, stay alert and keep learning!

Take care

Mr Morrow
Student Progress Leader Year 7