



Marden High School

Friday 12th February 2021

Dear All,

It may well be that you have already seen it - that you have been waiting all day for it to be posted - and are now in awe over what you have seen. Or maybe you're hanging on in order to savour the pleasure in a quiet moment later. I'm talking, of course, about the "Marden's Got Talent" Winter Edition final show which can be found on the school website as of today. There is, indeed, some quite brilliant talent to be seen, and it never fails to amaze and surprise me to see some of the skills our students have. This really is a must watch, so once you've read the rest of this newsletter, get a cup of tea, settle back, and enjoy the show.

Last week our year 11 GCSE Physics students took the opportunity for a virtual visit to Kielder Observatory. The astronomer that they worked with was Adam Shore. He showed them the telescopes there and went on to explain the Life of a Star using images, some of which had been captured using the telescopes at Kielder. The night skies that are seen around the observatory are some of the darkest in Europe and so the images that are produced are quite remarkable. The students valued the event and sent comments expressing how much they had enjoyed the session. Space Physics is one of the modules for the GCSE Physics exam.

As you may be aware, British Science Week runs from 5th – 14th March 2021 on the theme of "Innovating for the Future". Activity will mostly be online, and RTC North has put together a programme showcasing North East innovation and entrepreneurship, including sessions being delivered by their STEM Ambassadors - real life scientists, inventors and business people - which I'm sure will make for interesting and engaging viewing for our students. Mrs Glover will be emailing a copy of the flyer to students and parents which contains information on the speakers and a LIVE link to register for the events, which promise to be not only excellent additional learning, but also inspirational for this country's next generation of innovators.

Recently I have spoken about the positive feedback that students and parents have given about our remote learning provision, and this week I thought I would share with you some feedback from staff. We now have a good picture of how it is going and we are very happy to report that the

results are extremely positive. While some students are still having difficulties accessing synchronous learning, and we must remain sympathetic to this at the same time as continuing to help put solutions in place, attendance at sessions is quite high (about half to two thirds of the students on average) and all teachers report that student engagement of those in the sessions is excellent. Activities that teachers provide are varied and range from providing feedback to modelling and explaining new content. Most popular has been the use of live streaming for discussion and we have seen the benefits of this not only in lessons but also in the form tutor seminars that have also taken place where we have been able to check students' wellbeing and have given them an opportunity to talk about the many other aspects of school life that may be on their minds. Many staff are using live streaming very creatively and, as it becomes more familiar, are exploring further ways that it can enhance the learning. The most significant finding from the feedback is how welcome some level of interaction has been for students and for staff. This has all produced some outstanding work, and in this half-term's newsletter you can read see some of the lessons our students have been involved in in different subjects. We all miss being part of the physical Marden community and seeing each other on a daily basis. For now though, meeting up virtually is providing a good second best.

The government-funded Oak Academy, which I have spoken about in previous newsletters, and which provides free online lessons, has now been made zero-tariff for mobile users, meaning it doesn't count towards data usage. This is very welcome and different from previous data schemes, as it is universal and doesn't require families to request more data. Hopefully this will lead the way for other free-to-access educational websites and platforms to do the same, and in the meantime, the Oak Academy lessons can be a useful supplement to our remote learning provision.

I speak regularly in this newsletter about the importance of continually developing literacy, no matter what age we are or what level we are at. Shared reading is an excellent way to develop children's language and communication as well as boost reading skills, and the half term break can be a good opportunity to do some more of this. The Education Endowment Foundation has produced an advice sheet of '7 Top Tips' for parents and carers. It offers creative and engaging ways that shared reading can easily be done when children are learning at home, and you can read the detail of this in this half term's newsletter.

We hope to be able to bring our Year 11 students and their parents an update soon after the half term break on the detail of how GCSE grades are to be arrived at. The consultation put out by Ofqual has now closed and so we are currently waiting for the feedback from that.

North Tyneside Council's annual Apprenticeship Fair is going virtual this year. The event runs from 10am - 12pm on Saturday 13th February, and will feature information on apprenticeships, the application process, employers, as well as training providers talking about the apprenticeships they offer, with a live chat facility. The event is designed to inform and support both students and parents and carers. There is no requirement to register beforehand, just go to <https://skillsnorthtyneside.org.uk/NAW2021> on the day.

So we have reached the end of a very different half term where we have been generally physically distant, but perhaps close in other ways, not least in our common efforts to provide the best we can for our children. We are approaching a pivotal moment for the country on the 22nd when the Prime Minister will be reviewing the situation with the lockdown, and no doubt making announcements about when schools will be allowed to open to more students. In all of this it is important that we remember we are not passive observers, but that each one of us is an active player with agency, able to take opportunities no matter how slight, to create our brighter future. The physicist Amory Lovins was once asked whether he was an optimist or a pessimist. He replied:

"I am neither — because they are just two different forms of fatalism. The optimist says things have to get better, and the pessimist says things have to get worse. I believe in applied hope. Things can get better, but you have to make them so."

Thank you for your continued support and take care.



Mr M. Snape
Head Teacher