



Dear parents and staff,

Around this time, we would usually be celebrating the end of another school year at our leavers' services. We would look back to the successes, the funny moments and those other times that we shared as a school community. We would be celebrating the achievements of the children and wishing our Year 6 children success for the future.

Well, we cannot do that as we usually would, in assemblies, church services and end of year plays; so, I am doing that now in this letter.

The end of a school year is a time of mixed feelings; endings always are. I do not want to talk about endings, because nothing ever really ends – it changes into something else. Endings are just memorable episodes in our journey through life.

Neither do I want to discuss whether or not we are approaching the end of the pandemic – perhaps, as Winston Churchill once said, that this may be the “end of the beginning”.

What I do want to talk about is what is certain - that we are almost at the end of a unique school year. We are about to say “goodbye” to another wonderful group of students in Year 6, as well as other children whose families are moving away.

At this point, I would like to quote some wisdom.

Ronan Keating once sang that “life is a rollercoaster, just gotta ride it”. Wise words indeed. Although the lyrics later in the song (“na na na na, naaa”) might be less inspiring, it does sum up how many have felt recently. At times, it might seem as if we are being carried along on a roller-coaster or in a strong current, feeling out of control. That is certainly how I felt as the scale of the impact of the COVID pandemic began to become clear. Many people desperately attempted to take control through, among other things, buying more groceries than they really needed or going into complete isolation.

However powerless big events may make us feel, we always have an element of control in how we meet those challenges that are presented to us, and I have seen that with the way that the whole school community has come together over the last three months. The children at school and at home have made all of us incredibly proud – they have gone through challenging times that we could not have possibly imagined at their age, and they have adapted and remained positive and cheerful.

Year 6 have missed out on challenging themselves at their residential and in their end of year play, but they have proven themselves the most robust, stoic and cheerful Year 6 I can remember. While having the courage to hurl yourself off a high ledge when abseiling or zip-wiring is one thing, dealing with a world which changed so significantly in such a short space of time required courage on another level. I can say the same for every child at St James'. The children could not change the big things, but they kept going and found the inner strength to achieve such a positive end to the school year. I would like to thank all of the children for making us all so proud over the last three months – we are a very lucky school.



The last three months have been the strangest I have ever experienced as a teacher. Being driven to school (my arm was still in a sling at that point) through deserted roads to an almost empty school, before eking out a rationed anti-bac gel onto my hands, it was easy to imagine the air itself was dangerous.

Preparations, interpreting government guidance, creating rotas, timetables, risk assessments, planning (and then revising plans), reinterpreting different government advice and holding zoom meetings with unfailingly positive staff members (literally falling over themselves to volunteer to come to school and help), took up much of our time as a leadership team for weeks. The teachers worked tirelessly to continue to deliver the learning in a completely new way, and to meet the needs of their children as far as they possibly could, all the while desperately missing their classes.

Welcoming more children to the school, a few at first but then in greater numbers, was a huge turning point. It was a very welcome contrast to the silent weeks that had preceded, where only two or three classrooms were open with a handful of children in each. Schools should be full of life, laughter and children sensibly keeping to the left in corridors; they can be eerie places when empty. It is a tonic to the soul to see the fields, playgrounds, classrooms and corridors now filled with life, even as we miss those children still not able to be at school.

Now, in mid-July, we can look back at an unprecedented and unique academic year; we have almost reached the summer holidays.

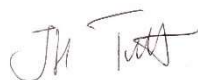
I would really like to thank the parents at St James' for the incredible level of support they have given to our school this year. It is appreciated more than you can imagine. We are in awe of all of those parents fitting in home schooling around their jobs, younger children and everyday life, helping to keep their children as motivated as they could and supporting them with their learning and, most importantly, their mental health; whatever you achieved and however much you were able to do with your child(ren) we would like to thank all of you for what, at times, must have seemed a thankless task.

I would also like to thank all of the incredible adults who work at St James', whether working in school with the children, supporting the children's learning from home, working in the offices or keeping the site safe and clean. This is the strongest team I have ever had the privilege to work with. This has been a difficult year and we continue into an uncertain future, but I know that the staff at St James' are ready and willing to rise to any challenge.

With the wise words of Ronan fading away ("na na na na naaa, na na na na naa") in the same way as this academic year is coming to an end, I hope that like me you are now looking forward to a restful break. We know in our hearts that every one of us will be prepared to meet and overcome the new challenges that the next academic year will bring, and we will continue to work together to flourish as individuals, as a community and as learners.

The future is still an amazing place. I hope, like me, that you are looking forward to exploring it together.

Kindest regards,



John Tutt

