

## *WEEK 1 - Friday 8 September 2023*

“I will not complain about the heat. I will not complain about the heat.”

As I write this in a non-air conditioned, south-facing office with the temperature nudging twenty-six degrees, I am tempted to long for cooler months when our working environment is much more comfortable. But then, I am reminded that this may be the last long period of hot weather that we may see again until next June and I am determined to make every minute of it so – once this blog is written – I shall be heading home to sit in the garden until the sun goes down.

The final days of summer always generate mixed emotions in me. I look back at what we have done as a family; where we have been, the fun we have had and the memories we have planted in our children that will hopefully last a lifetime. There was a song from long ago, whose title I can't recall, which told of the beachwear we wear as children. At the end of every summer, we pack it away until the next year; but, because our children grow so quickly, we don't realise at the time that they will probably never wear it again. A metaphor for every year of our life as it skips by.

Summer's end always generates those kind of melancholy feelings and makes me determined to wring every minute out of each summer, especially as our children grow up so quickly.

Our students and staff have certainly tried to do that this week. I cannot recall a happier and more optimistic start to the new term at Hesse High School. As I have reported many times, we continue to grow and we now have almost 1400 students on roll here, along with 184 staff. There have never been more children and adults on our site since the school opened in 1948 and the new arrivals – students and staff – have really brought new energy and enthusiasm to the place.

Your children will, I'm sure, have reported to you some of the changes we have made to our behaviour procedures, making our expectations crystal clear in a relentlessly consistent way. We have also made our sanctions ladder shorter and brisker, reducing the number of chances that students previously had to change their behaviour. This is a challenge for them but one that they have risen to very well so far, thanks to the clear messages and expectations that have been given by our staff.

A special mention for our Year 7 students and a big 'thank you' to their parents/carers and wider family members who have supported us in making their first week such a successful one. They have looked fantastic, and they have been a credit to you all in terms of their manners and conduct around the school. We are really pleased to have them, and you, as part of our school community.

You will have heard the news about the problems experienced by some schools with RAAC. I wrote to all parents earlier in the week confirming that, following inspections by the Local Authority a few years ago, we do not have any RAAC in our school buildings so thankfully that is not a concern for us. As a school that benefited from a rebuild in 2014-16, we are very fortunate not to face some of the challenges that other school leaders do with their school sites, although there are several colleagues within our Trust for whom school building maintenance is a daily concern. Thankfully, working as a Trust, we can alleviate some of those pressures, but I hope that this latest example of Government neglect of state education might lead to increased investment across the school estate nationally. Once again, I was reminded of the words of Sam Seaborn, a character from one of my favourite TV shows, *The West Wing*, when he said;

“Education is the silver bullet. Education is everything. We don't need little changes, we need gigantic, monumental changes. Schools should be palaces. Competition for the best teachers should

be fierce; they should be making six figure salaries. Schools should be incredibly expensive for government and absolutely free of charge to its citizens...”

Here, here, to that.

Finally, a reminder that our Open Evening for parents of children in Years 5 and 6 is coming up on the 28 September. If you have family or friends that are considering sending their children to Hessle High School and/or have not previously visited the site, please let them know and we will be starting our promotion of this event shortly.

Have a lovely weekend in the sunshine.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 2 - Friday 15 September 2023***

Last week I updated you on the changes that we have made to our behaviour procedures to drive up the positive behaviour in our school. This is captured in a new Behaviour Policy which, once ratified by our Governors, I will share with you. In the meantime, let me give you an overview of some of those changes.

Firstly, we have adopted a three-step system of behaviour expectations. In line with all of our Trust schools, we are now using a Warn - Consequence - Remove system. This is designed to allow for a calm and purposeful working environment for our students so that they can thrive and achieve their best. This reduces the number of chances that students must correct their behaviour. We expect that this will – in the first few weeks – lead potentially to more students being removed from classes but we know that this will soon settle down as students adapt to the high expectations.

In addition to this, we have developed a more comprehensive recognition and rewards package for students allowing staff to recognise when students are doing their best and promote positive behaviours in and around the school. I am delighted that this has already resulted in over 17,000 House Points being awarded so far this year! You will see the evidence of this in your child's planner through teacher stamps and written warnings. As students accumulate House Points, they will then receive recognition in the form of certificates and letters home, whilst also being rewarded with small treats too. In time, these extrinsic rewards ensure that positive behaviour becomes habitual in all our students.

We have also improved our communication with parents in this respect and we are notifying parents when their child receives a warning in class so that you can more closely monitor your child's behaviour and support us with discussions at home. A warning is a low-level sanction which does not lead to a sanction in school yet we still expect students to heed these warnings and do their best not to get any more. Your help and support with this is greatly appreciated.

We are delighted that our uniform standards remain very high and once again I thank you for this. Getting uniform right at the start of term is never easy and it takes a partnership between school and home to do that, so thank you.

Next Wednesday is our Year 11 Information Evening for students, parents and carers of that year group, and I would urge you to do what you can to attend. The event starts at 4.45pm with a presentation at 5pm from a number of staff, including myself and Head of Year 11, Mr Leckenby. We will outline many of the key events on offer to support the students, there will be information from

Mr Jarman about our outstanding Consortium Sixth Form College offer and Miss Lawes will also be on hand to offer any other careers support. We will also provide you with a calendar of key dates which include the first round of Mock Exams, starting on 23 October. It will wrap up at around 6pm and this is just one of several information events we will be having to support you to support your child. I look forward to seeing you there.

This weekend is the final home game of the Super League season for Hull FC and I shall be at the MKM Stadium with my son, and some friends, tomorrow afternoon to watch them. Sadly, it has been another disappointing season for the team, and we are probably glad to see it come to an end. Nevertheless, it is no bad thing for my son to experience the highs and the lows of following a sports team. His chosen football team is Manchester City so I guess he relies on Hull FC for the lows! I have been supporting FC for 45 years now and there have been plenty of lows, which has made the successes all the sweeter. This is what sport, and life, is about and these are important lessons for young people to learn. That said, I shall still be cheering for the lads tomorrow afternoon from the East Stand.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, I hope you enjoy some of the sunshine that is promised.

Take care and thank you as ever for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 3 - Friday 22 September 2023***

I have spent much of this week reflecting on parental engagement with schools. I am aware that this is dangerous territory on which a Headteacher might choose to encroach in a blog read almost exclusively by parents and carers but, nevertheless, here goes....

Firstly, we are delighted that, so far, our attendance is higher than last year. We're not back to pre-Covid levels yet but its going in the right direction. Across the country, attendance to schools – particularly Secondary schools – has been painfully slow to return to pre-Pandemic levels and while there might not appear to be much difference between 92% and 96%, the impact on schools and students of those missing students is significant. For example, a school that previously had 4% absence would have probably have a small team of people who dealt with those absences. With 8% absence, their workload has doubled, as has the impact on teaching staff of helping students to catch up when they return. Socially, it becomes difficult for even more students to return to school after absence and that can lead to peer falling out. In short, attendance has been stubbornly reluctant to improve and it causes a huge headache.

There is no single cause for this, but researchers now believe that the 'social contract' that meant that parents and carers did everything they could to get their child into school has broken down. A recent report by Public First captured the size of the problem and also quoted a number of parents expressing their reasons for not sending their children to school; comments such as 'Life's too short' and 'I don't really care anymore' speak to a wider culture of hopelessness amongst some in our communities which may have its roots in the pandemic but has been exacerbated by the sense of economic decline.

As frustrating as this is, it is hard to be too critical of parents with these views because everyone's reality is their own and each one of us are affected differently by the pandemic/cost of living crisis. What we need is a plan to turn this around and although the Government have set up a number of

working parties and taskforces, there is no significant funding for schools to support the families that need it. This year we will have an additional funding stream called the Covid Recovery Premium which for us is around £100,000 or, to put it another way, approximately 0.8% of our total school budget. This is useful money but goes nowhere near covering the staff and resources needed to deal with the attendance, behaviour, emotional and academic support needed by schools in the years following the pandemic. And so we do our best with what we've got.

On Wednesday, we held our Year 11 Information Evening for parents, students and other family members. My senior team and I explained to those present about the plans and support that we have in store for Year 11 students this year. It was great to see everyone there and lovely to talk to so many people afterwards about their hopes for their child this year and beyond. It was a shame that only 25% of the year group's parents managed to attend and, as leaders, we have discussed how we can better communicate to you (if you're someone that couldn't attend) in the coming months. There is so much support available from experienced and dedicated staff and we want to help you to help your child to succeed this year. We have put the presentation online and it can be found here, and we are also looking to produce a fortnightly Learning Bulletin which captures the key information on mock exams, revision etc. If you do struggle to engage with us in school or have ideas of how we can better reach more people, please let me know.

Finally, it has been another enjoyable week in school. The behaviour routines are beginning to settle in, and students are responding positively to the increasing rewards and recognition on offer. We have had several visitors to our school this week and they have all commented on the good behaviour and courteous manners of the students and the calm environment. And once again, uniform continues to make me very proud indeed. Thank you for your support with this.

Next week is one of my favourite of the school year. Thursday's Open Evening is the night when we open our doors to what has become hundreds and hundreds of families who are considering choosing Hessle High School for their child. The staff all stay behind to put on great demonstrations in their subject areas but I don't see very much of that because I have the best job of all; I get to talk to parents in the Main Hall and tell them how proud I am of our school community and why I feel our school, staff and students is very special indeed.

If you, or someone you know, has a child in Year 5 or 6, please pass on the message and it would be great to see even more in our school on Thursday. And also please note that our Post-16 Open Evening is also coming up in a few weeks (17 October) - an opportunity for students in Year at Hessle (or elsewhere) to come and have a look at what we have to offer.

And so to the weekend. I am hoping for some dry weather so that my son and I can play golf on Saturday morning. He asked me to take him for the first time just before the end of the summer break. He loved it so much that we played again a few days later. He reckons after three or four more rounds he will be beating me; personally I don't think it will take that long, but it is an enjoyable four hours of just him and me, talking and enjoying something together. I can't wait.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

#### **WEEK 4 - Friday 29 September 2023**

I write this week's blog still smiling, nay glowing, from the aftermath of last night's Open Evening. At the end of a fantastic yet exhausting night, we tallied up the numbers and found that 370 families had visited us. That is a remarkable number and is testament to the reputation that our school enjoys in the community. I have thanked my staff for this already but this is also a credit to yourselves as current parents/carers for the support you give us in setting and maintaining high standards of behaviour, uniform and educational quality. These high numbers ensure we will continue to operate at full capacity with the benefits that brings in terms of resources. Thank you.

I have touched on the subject of school uniform many times in this blog and this is still a topic that excites rather a lot of strong feeling from people that have never worked in, nor led, a school. Often the comments are similar to this:

"What difference does it make what shoes they wear? How does that affect their learning?"

"I agree that a school should have rules, but some of them are just ridiculous."

The one that I find most interesting at the moment is this one; "School uniforms are out of date. They were okay in the '50s when everyone wore a suit to work but nowadays even bankers don't wear a tie."

I heard this one on LBC the other night and, as is often the case when radio phone in hosts choose to discuss schools, I found myself talking to the radio like a crazy man. "Who gives a hoot what bankers wear?" I said. Although I didn't say 'hoot'.

I wear a suit to work because it is smart, professional and it shows to my students and staff that I care enough about them to present myself in that way. Uniforms and smart dress help us to construct the cultural norm that school is a special place and that we are all worth dressing smartly for. It conveys the status of our environment. There are many other reasons why school uniform is necessary, but this is the one which addresses the ridiculous comparison to 'bankers'.

One or two parents have asked me how the golf went last weekend and I am happy to report that we both scored well; in my son's case, he is improving his score by four or five shots each time he plays, and I was not as bad as normal. I'm still too embarrassed to share the actual scores but let us say it was comfortably over three figures. Comfortably.

This weekend, he and his mum are going to watch Hull City on Saturday afternoon so I shall be spending the afternoon with my teenage daughter (she's actually only 9, but you would never know it!). Our days out usually mean McDonalds, H&M, Primark and then the Odeon cinema, where I usually fall asleep holding her hand. Bliss.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, enjoy it and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

#### **WEEK 5 - Friday 6 October 2023**

I've always been suspicious of those people who start articles, essays or blogs with a pretentious quote from some obscure historical figure to introduce their point. But I believe it was the ancient Greek Stoics who first introduced the idea of Circles of Control and Influence. The Stoics were a group of philosophers who believed that the way to a happy life was to live a life of virtue and to

ignore the search for external things such as wealth and material possessions. They also believed that we could live more peaceful and fulfilling lives if we focussed our attention and energy on what we can control and not waste time and energy worrying about things that we cannot control.

This idea is commonly used in leadership books and courses now and it certainly applies to education; both in how we lead schools but also in how we develop young people. Our students worry about so many things - mostly how they are perceived by others – but we try to teach them that this is something they cannot control; what they can control is how they themselves behave and how they treat others.

Somewhere in between ‘control’ and ‘concern’ is the sphere of influence; if we can control the controllable well, we may be able to have a greater influence on others, which may reduce the things that we are concerned about. Still following? Have a look at the model here and you’ll see it makes sense. I try to apply this a lot to my leadership thinking. We often sit in meetings finding ourselves discussing things which we are worried about and which concern us. But then we try to wrest the discussion back to the things we can control in school. There are not too many levers in school – the school day, the timetable, the rules and expectations. But if we get these right and apply them consistently, we can influence behaviour – of students and staff, and then things start to happen.

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This week’s focus for me has been meeting with Heads of Department and Heads of Year for their mid-term reviews. Before each of these meetings, our middle-tier leaders produce a report summarising their work and their future plans and then these are discussed in a meeting with myself and other senior leaders. What pleases me most is the desire that these leaders have to keep improving our school; their passion for improvement is evident in the depth of analysis and the thought that goes into their planning. Their ideas are discussed and challenged and this produces the Development Plans for each subject and year group which becomes the basis for their work throughout the rest of the year. Of course, they often have to respond to things that just happen but beyond that they are working to a plan for improvement that is set out at the start of the year. These leaders tell me that they are often anxious before these meetings which I take to be a good thing; I am nervous before similar meetings with Governors and Trust colleagues. It is a desire to do our jobs well that leads to this and keeps us all striving to be better.

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In recent years, we have made several changes to the school day in order to apply social distancing and to accommodate our growing number of students on roll. We are now in a position where we believe the current arrangements will meet our needs and we intend to make them permanent. As this is a change from the school day that operated pre-pandemic, we need to consult on them first. This letter has been sent to parents with information. Please note this does not mean any change from the current school day.

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Today is the start of a period that most teachers hate – the start of Hull Fair! Anyone that works in a school in Hull and the neighbouring areas will know this is a distraction to students- to say the least - and we work especially hard to keep students focused in school. Thank you for your support in ensuring that your child can enjoy Hull Fair but also be in school on time each day next week.

My wife is not from this area so doesn't really share my fondness for Hull Fair. The kids are – oddly – somewhere in between and over the past couple of years they've chosen other treats rather than go to the fair (we got away with paying for a film on Sky Movies one year!). This year, they've figured out that we've been short-changing them for years, so there is no avoiding a family trip. So long as I get my pattie and chips from Bob Carver's and some fudge to take home, I'll enjoy it. And I know they will.

Enjoy the weekend, the Fair if you're going and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### **WEEK 6 - Friday 13 October 2023**

There has not been a year in my 23 -year teaching career when I have not taught Sixth Form students. Even as an NQT, I was thrown in at the deep end teaching a Year 13 Business & Economics group after an experienced member of staff decided to resign in August! In that time, I have taught countless specifications and many hundreds of students. It has been the most enjoyable part of my teaching career and, even now, if staff see me walking up to Tranby House to see my Sixth Form group on a Tuesday morning, they'll notice the extra spring in my step. I love it.

As Headteacher, I desperately want as many of my staff to enjoy the same privilege. Maintaining a school Sixth Form is not easy. It is hard to maintain focus across multiple key stages and it is expensive when you consider that it mostly consists of smaller-than-average class sizes being taught by our most expensive staff. But there is something special about having a School Sixth Form. I went to a school sixth form and I know that the spotty, shy and awkward teenager that I was would never have prospered in a big Sixth Form College. I'd have been lost and never fulfilled my potential. So having a Sixth Form at Hessle is very personal to me and I am hugely passionate about it. But it is never guaranteed.

We face incredibly stiff competition from larger Post-16 providers in our area and we can never match their promotions, their 'Beverly Hills 90210' style environment or their range of courses but we can offer something they cannot – the benefit of the years-long relationships that students have built with staff, the familiarity with the school and the knowledge that, if they go through a tough time, there are people around who know them well and who can provide support. And, working with our partners at Cottingham and Wolfreton and more recently at Holderness Academy, we can still offer over thirty-five different Post-16 courses for students across a range of disciplines.

Next Tuesday is our Post-16 Open Evening at Hessle High. Anyone with a child in Year 11 or 10 at our school or elsewhere is very welcome to attend. You will hear from myself, from Mr Jarman, our Head of Sixth Form, and many of our teachers. Most importantly, you will get to meet and speak to our current Sixth Form students who will be able to explain exactly what it is like to study with us. It promises to be a busy, but highly engaging, evening and we hope to see you there from 5pm.

'Hull Fair Week' draws to a close in the next few days and today we have definitely seen the Hull Fair weather in school. We are hoping for a little Autumn sunshine this weekend which gives me an outside chance of one final cut of the grass before the lawnmower is packed away for another year. But best of all, the kids have a sleepover at their grandparents tomorrow which gives my wife and I the chance for a night out on our own. In the past six weeks, I don't think we have spoken to each other for more than 15 minutes without a domestic responsibility or work job or conversation butting in. When we have time without the children, we always start with grand plans for a posh

meal, cocktails and a night on the town but it almost always ends early, dozing on the sofa by 9pm with a glass of Baileys!

Whatever you are doing, have a lovely weekend and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 7 - Friday 20 October 2023***

As I write this, Storm Babet is howling away outside of my window and the rain is lashing down. Three weeks ago, it felt like the middle of summer and now.... it's definitely not. There is no doubt that the weather outside affects the climate in schools. Warm, hazy days with students sitting in the sunshine or playing sports are the ideal – lots of exercise, Vitamin D and space to spread out. Wet and windy – not so good.

It is well known that SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) is a real thing, even if we do not know why. And while we all feel a bit less optimistic in the late Autumn and Winter, nobody can really explain why some of the countries that have the harshest winters (such as in Scandinavia) also regularly record the highest levels of happiness and mental health. It is surely down to adopting a positive mindset which proves invaluable as the endless nights prevail.

In school, the wet weather compels the students to want to stay inside which means space in the canteen is at a premium. To feed and house over 600 students on each forty-minute sitting is a herculean effort and I am proud of the dedication of the staff to maintaining our standards.

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I wrote last week about our Sixth Form and I was delighted to see so many prospective students and their families at our Open Evening on Tuesday. Over 150 families attended from across the area and from a number of other schools too; the feedback on their experience was fantastic and I was delighted to see our Head Students and their peers receiving such praise for their contribution to the night, speaking to people about their experience and how to manage the transition from Year 11. They were a credit to their families, and we are very proud of them. Most of those students that attended have now applied for a place in the Sixth Form which will then prompt a face-to-face interview with Mr Jarman, Head of Sixth Form. We do this early so that the young people can get their plans in place and focus on the rest of Year 11 and achieving their full potential. If you need any information about our Sixth Form, please contact Mr Jarman at the school.

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It is a big sporting weekend yet again in the Groak household. The England cricketers are in action tomorrow and then the Rugby Union boys meet South Africa in the World Cup Semi-Final in the evening. My son and I will be watching. And then, on Sunday, the Rugby League team (my favourite version of the sport) play Tonga. On weekends like this, the TV is monopolised so it's probably for the best that my wife is away this weekend – off to see 'S Club' in Manchester and reliving her youth.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, stay warm and dry and have a good weekend

Mr Groak

Headteacher

## *WEEK 8 - Thursday 26 October 2023*

You will know from this blog, that I take a huge amount of pleasure from sport. I was never much of a sportsman unfortunately, but I stay active through running and the very occasional game of golf. That's as much sport as I can find the time for now. But I love watching it, especially when I can do so with my son. We both have season tickets for Hull FC and try to get to a handful of Yorkshire cricket matches each year if we can. And Sky Sports is an almost permanent fixture on our TV screen.

My son is a much better sportsman than me and – at 13 – already shows enough focus, and a bit of talent, to be able to play sport at a social level for as long as he wishes to do so. He plays football for Hessle Sporting, alongside a number of Hessle students, as well as being a keen all-round cricketer for Kirkella CC. He has hung up his tennis racket in exchange for the golf course in recent months and has good enough hand-eye coordination to be decent at that too. I stopped 'letting him win' many years ago and so our kick-arounds, cricket nets and golf games are strictly competitive, and I love it.

One regret from the career path that I have chosen is that I rarely find the time to be able to watch our Hessle students in sporting action. I went quickly into management which squeezed out the chance to spend time on the touchline, or courtside. But I am always delighted to hear how well our students are doing.

We have a decent track record of success but this term, so far, has been beyond belief. I keep getting updates on this victory or that success and, at the moment, can barely keep track of them. A few weeks ago, Hessle sports teams had won sixteen out of seventeen competitive sports fixtures that had been played this term; and the success goes on.

On Wednesday, we entered two teams into a girl's football tournament organised by the Tigers' Trust. The teams comprised girls in Years 7 to 9 and the two teams were drawn in separate groups. Both teams qualified comfortably from their groups and went into the knock-out stage where, again, both sides got through those games easily. In the semi-finals, they were drawn apart again and our 'A' team beat Driffield 4-1, while the 'B' team triumphed 1-0 over Wolfreton. And so, it was an all-Hessle final! For the record, the A team won the final, but all the girls had done fantastically well and were an absolute credit to the school and the staff that took them.

This year, we are delighted to have such a strong team of staff who are passionate about sport and giving our students the opportunity to take part in so many fixtures. Thank you to Carrie Leckenby, Rachael Shiels, Ed Griffiths, Carl Hazel and Nathan Parkin for their time and commitment, as well as to the many other non-PE staff who also run teams and support the students in fixtures. I'm sure that those of you whose children benefit from these opportunities also appreciate it greatly.

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It has been a good week for Year 11 students and their first round of mock exams. The start of these exams always brings an extra level of educational maturity to the group and the earlier start this year has also been beneficial. We are trying everything we can to help you to also support the students and I was pleased to see how many parents/carers of Year 11 students accessed our new Success Bulletin (over 400 downloads). This will be sent out fortnightly and is aimed at keeping you fully informed of all the support available to your child in school as they navigate their way through Year 11. Please let us know what you think of it. The next one will arrive with you on November 10th.

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PLEASE NOTE – we are currently changing online payment providers as mentioned in correspondence to you recently. ParentPay will cease taking payments on Thursday 26 October at 2pm. After this time, payment can only be made via ArborPay. Please do this by logging into your parent account.

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Finally, half term is upon us, and I am ready for a rest. It has been a busy but successful eight weeks laying a platform for the rest of the year. We will mostly be at home next week, but I am looking forward to taking my mum to London on Saturday for the day. She doesn't know what we are doing yet but I'm sure we will also find some time to try a few of the old London pubs which we both love.

Whatever you are doing over the weekend and next week, take care and thank you again for all the support you have given to my staff over the last half term.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 9 - Friday 10 November 2023***

Just before half term, and just after the students had left the site for the day, an alert came through on our walkie-talkies that one of the school buses had broken down on Heads Lane, students were getting off it and the road was blocked. "It's carnage," was the phrase used by a passer-by. A number of colleagues and me, dashed out to the scene to discover that, actually, there wasn't carnage but merely a group of young people, some motorists and a bus driver trying to resolve an unexpected issue that had occurred. Noone was in real control but everyone was doing their best to stay safe and figure it out.

Quickly, we held the traffic, ensured that the students were safely off the bus, and on the footpath either to walk home or head back to school to wait for a replacement bus. The driver was given the help he needed and, within a few minutes, all was calm. It probably would have been even if we hadn't responded but it might have taken a little longer, with a little more risk.

"That was chaos," said one of my pastoral leaders as we walked back to school. Indeed it was. Until we brought order to it. And then it wasn't. Chaos is defined as a 'formless, jumbled, disorganized mass'. It can infer some malign intent but it is more likely the outcome of a number of individuals trying to pursue their own self-interest in an environment without clear parameters, rules or leadership.

On any given day, there are around 1500 children, young people and adults on our site and, at a few seconds past 12.15, it seems like they're all headed into the canteen for their lunch. By 12.30, most of them have got their food and are sitting eating, chatting to their friends or they have left and gone outside for some fresh air. It is a miracle of organisation, collective purpose and planning.

Whilst we teach the students to self-regulate themselves during this time (apart from having to queue and observe normal etiquette for a dining space, they can choose where to eat, where to sit and what to do with their lunch time), this period of time still requires supervision. There are 84 individual duty points across the two break and lunch sittings covering the entire site. That's every day. These are mostly carried out by senior leaders, pastoral staff and the voluntary efforts of a number of other staff who help to maintain order - and prevent chaos.

Making sure this works becomes a study in managing the flow of people. The reason why students have to move one way down a corridor, or leave the building by a particular door is not because we like to introduce a petty rule; it is to ensure that hundreds of people are moving smoothly with as little disruption or risk as possible. I never imagined – when I became Headteacher – that I would spend so much of my time thinking about these seemingly trivial things; but I have grown to realise that these are not trivial at all – they are integral to creating a strong positive culture within school. If students know what is expected of them and they live up to these expectations, they are showing respect for themselves, their peers and the school community. These are values we need them to have when they go into society as adults.

So it is vital that we can provide them with routine, order - and, yes, queues - so they can learn these skills of how to be a good citizen. If we do not, we allow 'chaos' (in its literal term, rather than being 'out of control') to take hold which has a damaging effect on our culture and on student development.

That is a roundabout way to tell you that I spent one day of the holidays in school with my Deputy, Mr Chapman, and Mr Owen, our Facilities Manager, ensuring we have our common spaces, such as the canteen, laid out as smartly as we can. As the weather gets colder and more students wish to stay inside the building, this is crucial. We made some changes, we will make more and I am confident, the students will be able to stay warm and comfortable through the colder months.

I also spent some time during half term reacting to the latest release of Bruce Springsteen concert dates and managed to secure tickets for a couple of shows, and then to book hotels. I have been expecting, since 2016, that 'this will be the last tour' but he and his band just keep on going, and so will I next Spring. I can't wait.

Finally, as I put the finishing touches to this blog, we are nearing 11am and our Two-Minute Silence. I am very proud of how our students always respond to this, showing their respect to those generations, old and not so old, who have performed a duty far more important than ours and made the ultimate sacrifice for others. We will all remember them.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 10 - Friday 17 November 2023***

This week's cabinet reshuffle may have hit the headlines because of David Cameron's return as Foreign Secretary; but the biggest surprise was probably the fact that Gillian Keegan ended the day still in post as Education Secretary! Keegan has now been in post for thirteen months and is probably due for a long service award by now.

Since Michael Gove was fired in 2014 after four years in charge, none of the other eight (8!) Education Secretaries have managed two years. But at least Zahawi (10 months), Cleverly (2 months) and Malthouse (7 weeks) would have had time to chair a meeting or maybe even a visit a school, whereas poor old Michelle Donelan probably didn't have time to make a coffee in the 36 hours she lasted in the Truss-chaos of last July!

It's crazy, isn't it? How do they expect to be taken seriously?

But, if it's good enough for those running the country, I have begun to consider whether we might have a reshuffle amongst our middle leaders here at Hessle. Mr Willson has had quite a stint as Head of Maths; I wonder if it might be time to move him to Art? That would allow me to move Miss Lewis to PE (she likes her football) and then Mrs Leckenby can move off the field to an indoor job as Head of Music. If there's still a vacancy after all of that, maybe I'll drag Mr Jolley out of retirement?

Of course, it would be ridiculous, and you would rightly ask me what on earth was going on at the school. Anyway, thankfully we don't have a new Education leader this week and so, for the moment, we can just get on with the job and this week has been a great one for our learners to enjoy experiences outside of the classroom.

Last Saturday, Mr Sellers and Miss Burrows took a group of Sixth Form Physicists to the Diamond Light Source venue in Oxfordshire to learn more about the UK's national synchrotron and how it is used. We are very proud of our Physics team here at Hessle. Physics teachers are the single most difficult specialists to recruit into schools nationally and many schools do not have a single specialist Physicist on their staff; we have three, which is a testament to the Science team and their commitment to developing the next generation of scientists, so that they can work in mind-bending places like the one they visited on Saturday.

On Wednesday, Year 7 students enjoyed 'All About Me' Day – a great opportunity for them to hear from guest speakers, specialist staff and others and to reflect on their own future. This involved a day off timetable, which created great excitement, but which also led to some really mature discussions about their futures and the great things they want to achieve with their lives.

Also, on Wednesday, a group of Year 9 students took to the road and spent the day at Yorkshire Wildlife Park on a Geography Field Trip. If you have been to this venue, you will know how lucky we are to have this practically on our doorstep and the students really enjoyed the visit whilst also learning a great deal about tourism and how land can be repurposed for different uses. Mr Carlin led the trip, and he could not praise the students highly enough for their behaviour and maturity.

And our older students have also been out and about with the Year 12 Spanish class enjoying a meal at El Toro restaurant on Wednesday night. Spanish is a new A Level for us at Hessle and their teachers, Miss Oddell and Mrs Groak, have been keen to provide students with the full experience of learning the language and culture, hence the trip to experience food and the tapas way of eating.

Finally, we also welcomed parents and carers of those students who participate in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme to school this week for their annual celebration event. This programme continues to be a real success for the school and for students, who start to participate from Year 9 onwards. This week, thirty students received their Bronze Award and a further fifteen received their Silver Award. Ella Whiting and Kieran Hudson were chosen to receive the special awards for outstanding achievement. My thanks to Miss Moore who leads the programme for us in school, and to Mrs Edwards and Mr Scott who support her with expeditions and much else besides.

This is just a flavour of the wide range of opportunities that our students have benefited from this week, thanks to the commitment of the staff to broaden horizons and raise cultural awareness.

I spent a few moments checking the Groak family calendar last night and realised that this coming weekend is the last one of the year that does not involve some form of family gathering or social get together. As good as they will be, I am looking forward to enjoying the weekend at as slow a pace as possible, finish my book and watching some TV with the kids.

Whatever you are doing, have a lovely weekend and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

**WEEK 11 - Friday 24 November 2023**

We all know that attendance of students to school is still a long way short of where it was before the pandemic and we are only now beginning to understand some of the complex reasons behind this apparent breakdown in the social contract between home and school. Amanda Spielman addressed this issue in her annual Ofsted report yesterday before she steps down as HMCI. At Hessle, our attendance is also stubborn and still lags behind where it was back in 2019. Roughly speaking, it has fallen from 95% to a little over 90% which doesn't seem like much but is essentially a doubling of absence, and a doubling of all of the consequences of student absence.

And the consequences of not attending school are huge.

Firstly, there is the academic impact; students with attendance below 90% (just one day off per fortnight) are three times as likely to miss their targets as those students with good attendance. This closes the door on a range of educational opportunities and means that young people can be playing 'catch up' for years to acquire the skills and qualifications they need to secure good and rewarding employment.

Secondly, there is the social and emotional impact. Students who regularly miss school, also miss their friends, classmates and teachers. A break from the social norms causes young people anxiety – they've missed out on conversations, gossip and the twists and turns of being a teenage student in school. This then makes them more likely to miss school again and becomes a downward spiral of absence and anxiety.

And finally, attendance – or non-attendance – becomes a habit. If you do not create the expectation that you will start the day positively and with structure and routine, you will find it a difficult thing to create later in life. We seek to instil these habits in our students and thank you for your support in doing so.

To tackle this 'doubling of absence', we are doing our best to increase our capacity. We have recruited two additional staff on a part-time morning basis to handle calls, chase up absent students and to make home visits. We are funding this from the last year of the Government's Recovery Premium and it is beginning to take effect.

If you feel you would benefit from support to help your child attend school more regularly or you are finding it harder to support them to school, please contact us as soon as possible.

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As I write this on Thursday afternoon, one of the smaller School Christmas Trees has just been taken from its store cupboard near my office – the first sign that we are getting nearer to yet another Christmas season. We finish school late this term (last day is Thursday 21 December) so there is still a long way to go but the weekends are fast disappearing and school events are taking on a more seasonal flavour. The staff at Hessle are very much in two camps; those that are putting their tree up this weekend, or those that are waiting until next weekend. The Groaks are definitely in the latter camp and ours will be going up next Sunday afternoon after Mrs Groak returns from the school trip to Lille.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 12 - Friday 1 December 2023***

One of my favourite Bruce Springsteen songs is a track from an album he released in 2007, relatively late in his career. 'Long Walk Home' was written during the George Bush Presidency and is the story of a man returning to his hometown to find that everything had changed and that he no longer recognised his hometown, or his home country. It is in part a downbeat song but one that also inspires with one particular verse which alludes to the unshakeable American values that are – or should be – true for all of us.

"Your flag flyin' over the courthouse

Means certain things are set in stone.

Who we are, what we'll do and what we won't"

Our school values are important to us; they define who we are, what we'll do and, most importantly for school leaders, what we don't do. You know that most Springsteen music inspires me but there are no finer lines in his music than this last one.

The most important of all our values is respect, which aligns with our vision that all our learners will develop exceptional character. And, to be clear and to paraphrase Mr Wolf (from the great movie *Reservoir Dogs*), 'just because you are a character doesn't mean that you have character'.

And we see this in many different ways. This week I received a letter from Emma Stothard who is the regional coordinator of The Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme, congratulating our school on our success as a DofE centre. We reintroduced the DofE to Hessle around four years ago and, under the leadership of Mrs Moore, it has played a significant part in developing character in our students. We currently have 64 young people enrolled on this programme and – over their time in our school – we are now projecting that over 15% of all our students will complete DofE. Mrs Moore is supported by lots of staff, especially on expedition weekends, but it is Mrs Edwards and Mr Scott, who are her main lieutenants, and they deserve so much credit for this work that they do. This week, they could be found on Heads Lane in front of the school, litter-picking in the hedges and paths around our school site, as part of the volunteer element of the Award.

We also see great character in the inclusive nature of our school and the relationships that exist between our diverse student group. One of the highlights of the week for me has been the emerging chess club that has engaged some of our Year 10 boys. With the weather too cold for football, they have taken up learning and playing chess. Some are very good players (although I am still undefeated in my one challenge game!) whilst some are just learning. It has been great fun and they really impressed me when they took one of our Year 7 boys under their wing to share in the competitions. It made his week and certainly demonstrated 'who we are and what we'll do.'

The arrival of the snow this week was met with some excitement but it really didn't amount to much; a few pea-sized snowballs each, and then it all turned to mush. Despite that, the students conducted themselves very well and, in general, we are very pleased with the way that our students have adapted to the changes we made to our behaviour policy this year. Visitors are always impressed when they walk around our building at how self-regulated our students and how calm the school feels. We are always looking to raise our standards though and I believe this year's changes,

and the response from students, has done that. Thank you again for your unwavering support for my staff when we do have to apply sanctions – the home/school partnership remains as strong as ever.

Which brings me to my final ‘thank you’ which goes to everyone involved in yesterday evening’s Year 11 Progress Evening, which saw a 79% attendance. This is almost 20% higher than the same time last year and a reflection of the engagement of students and families to succeed this summer. Thanks also to those staff who make the event happen, but whom you probably don’t see; Mrs Fantini, Mrs Corke, Mrs O’Connell, Mrs Grimes, Miss Harrington, Mrs Whiting and Mrs Challis in the Admin team who organise the appointments and organise all of the logistics; to Mr Owen, Mr Hunt, Mr Winter, Mr Worrall and Mr Scott, our Facilities Team, for changing the canteen into ‘parents evening’ and back again in the blink of an eye. To Mrs Donnelly for the catering, to our Head Students, Sofia and Joe and Student Representative, Blessing to our SLT and Exams team, Mrs Meir, Mrs Price, Mrs Anderson and Mrs Ashforth, as well as our Year 11 Team, Mr Leckenby and Miss Wilkin.

It is a fabulous team, which I am proud to lead.

This weekend, I am at home with the children while Mrs Groak (who also works here) is in France with three of our colleagues and thirty-two students. They left an icy school at 3am and by the time this goes out to you, they will be in Lille Christmas market. I joked about it being a holiday, but that did not go down too well with her so I feel obliged to spend the weekend doing something creative with the children. It will probably involve Christmas decorations!

Thank you for your support and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 13 - Friday 8 December 2023***

Yesterday afternoon, I was invited by Emma Hardy MP to join a group of other school leaders in a meeting with Catherine McKinnell MP, Labour’s Shadow Minister for Schools. She has only been in post for a month and is on a rapid fact-finding mission to discover what life is like in schools and what an incoming Labour Government can do to improve things. It was pleasing to see that their priority is changing the relationship between Government and schools so that it is much more like a partnership and less adversarial than it has been for most of the last 13 years. There are some funded changes to include breakfast clubs, networks for support staff and a commitment to review Ofsted which will almost certainly end single word judgements. Beyond that, not much. Which will certainly come as a relief to most of the profession.

It was a useful meeting and we all got plenty of time to speak to her. I emphasised one point in particular; that schools are being asked to do work that falls significantly outside of our remit, job descriptions and training and we do it because we want to support our most disadvantaged children and families. For that reason, the best thing a new Government can do is to stop making so many people disadvantaged in the first place! And then she headed off to Parliament for a debate on Rwanda, such is the varied life of an MP.

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I often use this blog to share with you some of the successes of our students and this week we were thrilled when a group of our students were successful in a Bowling competition. It was Thursday when twelve of our students in Year 9 and Year 10 attended the Bowling Panathlon Event at Hollywood Bowl. The students competed alongside 14 other teams and were commended for their

behaviour, attitude and skill. Jack Escreet top scored with 135 (the highest number of points within the competition), and Callum Wright came second with 107.

Our Year 10 Team came 4th overall within the competition and our Year 9 Team placed 1st progressing to represent Hessle High in the Panathlon Finals in January! Well done to them all and thank you to the staff for organising and accompanying the trip.

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We have a very talented staff here at Hessle and many of them possess talents outside of the classroom. Garry Burnett is not only an English teacher but also a published writer and playwright. In recent years, he has collaborated several times with local musicians who shared their early careers with Mick Ronson and David Bowie. His play 'Turn and Face the Strange' has been performed many times locally and is starting to pick up some national attention. It tells the story of Ronson and features a live band playing many of Bowie's hits as the story unfolds. I have seen it before and it is a great show. The show is back on again this weekend, this time at Hull New Theatre, and I shall be there tomorrow afternoon to watch it. Garry is also on stage as the narrator of the story. We all wish him well, as well as the rest of the cast/band and I am definitely looking forward to it.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, have a nice relaxing one and thank you as always for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 14 - Friday 15 December 2023***

Chronic underfunding, excessive workload, rising expectations. Ofsted. Mobile phones, fruit-flavoured vapes. Snapchat, Instagram and Tiktok.

A teacher recruitment crisis, a staff retention crisis, a crisis in public services which puts vulnerable families in a position where the only place they can turn to for support and help, is schools and teachers. Instagram, Tiktok and Snapchat. The long shadow of covid and its impact on attendance and attitudes to school. A lack of political leadership. Tiktok, Snapchat and Instagram.

These are just a few of the challenges you will face if you choose to become or remain a teacher in 2023. So why do we do it?

For events such as our Awards evening on Wednesday night. This is our annual opportunity to celebrate the very best of our school community and it was heart-warming once again to witness the special relationships that underpin the success achieved by our students.

Whilst some of our 'high-achievers' are rightly represented, we seek to reward hard work, effort and determination every bit as much as talent. Talent will only take you so far, as I told the parents and students on Wednesday. At the event, each of our subjects are represented by a member of staff who explains the reasons why they have chosen the three students nominated for each award. They then announce the winner. Most speak without notes and speak from the heart. There are some really touching messages and not a few tears.

One of my favourite moments came when Mrs Hall, Head of RE, explained why Alex had received her Year 11 Award for her determination to keep improving her GCSE RE grade. Alex hadn't achieved the highest grade but her dedication to improvement had impressed Mrs Hall the most. Alex wasn't present; it turned out that she didn't think she had a chance of winning because the other nominees

achieved higher grades than her. When she found out from a friend, she came into school the next day to collect her award. And brought a bunch of flowers for Mrs Hall. Moments like this are what make me most proud of leading this school.

Another highlight of the week was our wonderful Xmas Fayre on Tuesday afternoon. Organised by Mrs Bourne, Head of Portia, this saw lots of students across different year groups selling a range of gifts, craft items and cakes in aid of the Downright Special charity which they have adopted for the year, and which is very close to our collective hearts at Hessle. Embarrassingly, I never had any money on me so had to borrow five pounds from Mrs Groak in order to ensure I could support them. Altogether, they raised over £500 on the night to go towards their annual charity effort. And it was another busy night for Miss Raw, our singing coach/teacher, who performed some songs, having also done the same at our Awards Evening. Thank you to all concerned for a great whole-school event.

Finally, this weekend sees the wider Groak family get-together which it is our turn to host. My daughter has written a quiz and pantomime, my son is making starters and dessert which leaves me with just the main course, which will be my meatballs speciality. Not entirely Christmassy, but it is still over a week away!

Whatever you do this weekend, I hope it is as relaxing as the last weekend before Xmas can be and I thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 15 - Thursday 21 December 2023***

Roy Wood said that he 'wished it could be Christmas every day'.... really? Can you imagine?

Life in a large secondary school in the weeks building to the Christmas break is less festive than you might think. Although there is a tree up and some decorations, for everyone's sanity, we try to ensure that life goes on pretty much as normal. I used to work in an office long ago where, at the first sign of advent, normal work would be pushed to one side for the sake of parties, gift giving, quizzes and God-knows what. Productivity dived and everyone was fed up by the time they broke up on the last Friday before the Big Day and headed to the pub.

If schools acted in the same way, the consequences don't bear thinking about. For every child who'd quite like a bit of 'Home Alone' as a treat for finishing their work, there would be plenty more who would sit there, wondering why on earth they'd bothered turning up. When I was at school, 'watching a Christmas film' on the last day just wasn't possible. There was one TV in the entire school, and it took two caretakers half an hour to push it from A to B on its huge trolley. With the introduction of computers on every teachers' desk, came the temptation for them to flick a movie onto the screen during the last week of term. Headteachers, not wanting to appear like Mr Scrooge, would cite some copyright law as the reason why students wouldn't be allowed to watch a Xmas film. And those teachers who still did so would be looked down upon by colleagues for letting their guard down.

The reality is that schools do function better when students are engaged and challenged by their work; they feel safer in routines and less anxious if they know that their time in school is being used to good effect. So you won't see students watching TV on the last day of this term but that is not to say that there haven't been opportunities for some festive fun either.

Last week I mentioned our Christmas Fair and Celebration Evening; this week I want to pay a tribute to all our students that performed in the Christmas Concert at Hessle All Saints Church on Monday evening, along with their parents and families who turned up to support us. It was a fantastic show, and I was impressed by the sheer diversity of age ranges, of instruments being played and of musical styles. The segue between the hard, politicised rock of our Consortium Sixth Form band into a choral rendition of 'Hark the Herald Angels Sing' was as inspired as it was brave. Well done, Mrs Webb!

I am always quite nervous ahead of my reading and I try to capture the essence of our school and our students whenever I speak in the church. This reminded me of a reading I gave a few years ago when I literally read the lyrics to a song written by Nick Lowe but best known as an Elvis Costello recording, called 'What's so funny about peace, love and understanding.'. I love the song and am a big Costello fan (he still tours, and I would hugely recommend him – not as good as Bruce but definitely on the same page). The song is a lament to an over-cynical world where sentiments such as love and hope are sneered upon.

Well, not at Hessle High School, they're not. The song is an inspiration to celebrate the good deeds of our young people, of those that raise money for the less fortunate, of those who challenge themselves to perform in a school concert and those that dare to speak up for injustice through their choice of music. There's nothing funny, or embarrassing, about peace, love and understanding. We need more of it.

To end, despite my fondness for some of the themes of Christmas, I'm glad it's not Christmas every day. Too exhausting. But I am looking forward to the break. After the main festivities are over, we are taking advantage of the time off over New Year to have a week in Sicily. We have never been, but it looks beautiful and, with the benefit of a hire car, we are doing some exploring of the island. I am hoping to see some of the 'Godfather' filming locations whilst the kids are excited about going on the beach in winter (I'm not sure it's going to be as warm as they are thinking). Whatever, I am looking forward to spending some quality time with the family after a very busy term in school.

Whatever your plans, have a peaceful and relaxing Christmas break.

Thank you for the support you have given to myself and my staff in 2023 and I hope that 2024 is a time of happiness and joy for you all.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 16 - Friday 12 January 2024***

On Tuesday morning, in my Year 11 Assembly, I talked to them about the brevity of their time left in our school and the fact that there were now just 73 school days before their first formal GCSE examination (there are now only 69!). In fact, even that isn't true as they are doing GCSE and BTEC assessments all the time, in the form of coursework and the like. It is the biggest year of their lives to date but I always try to reassure them that they are not alone and surrounded by a team of staff whose job it is to help young people like them every year. We know what we're doing, and they just need to play their part, do as they told and engage fully. It has the potential to work spectacularly well and we will continue to reiterate the importance of taking up every opportunity that is offered to them.

This next few weeks is significant for Year 11 and we try to capture the work that is going on in our Year 11 Success Bulletin which is sent to parents and students each fortnight. Here it is, for those

that may have missed it or who wish to see what is coming when your child reaches that age. Next week is another big week for them. On Tuesday, some of our Year 11s will be heading to the University of Hull for a revision day, along with students of the same age across our Trust. This is the first event of its kind and demonstrates the power of collaborative working across our schools. I am sure the students will rise to the occasion and get a lot out of it. Then there is the Success Event on Thursday evening for all students and parents, where there will be range of revision material available as well as tips and advice that can help the revision. I will also speak to parents about the remaining support available in the run up to exams.

To that end, I must remind you of our Year 11 Mock Interview Day coming up on Friday 2 February. This is the date each year on which only Year 11 students are in school, with other students working from home. This gives us the unique opportunity to bring in a swathe of business visitors to provide interview and mentoring support for our year 11s, followed by an intensive target setting session with their teachers. Above and beyond the benefits of the day, this is also a watershed for some; the day on which everything drops into place and they recognise that now is the time to really step up their preparations for the summer's exams.

We have written to the students outlining what is expected of them on the day and I would like to thank all parents in all year groups for your support with this event.

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Whilst there is a great deal going on 'under our noses' each day, this is the time of year when we begin to look firmly ahead to the next year as we advance our curriculum and staffing plans, in conjunction with our colleagues in the Central Team. This gathers pace on Tuesday when I will present our requirements for next year, teaching and non-teaching staff, and seek their support to begin our recruitment. We must start early as it is common for school staff to be looking for new challenges this early in the year even if it means they do not actually move until September. We have a strong record of recruiting well due in part to getting in there early and we hope it will be the same again. That said, our numbers on roll are closing in on our capacity and so we do not anticipate being too active this year.

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Like most people, I watched the ITV drama, Mr Bates versus The Post Office recently. It was a tough watch and, ironically, my wife and I finished the final episode on Sunday evening before returning to school on Monday morning. The contrast between the chronic lack of integrity shown by Post Office leaders on TV and the enthusiasm and selflessness shown by my colleagues in school on Monday was stark. Their commitment to plan and prepare great lessons and resources for your children was humbling. I am very lucky to work in a sector where honesty, integrity and public service are taken so seriously.

The theme of Monday was through-school collaboration and so we had all our Academy staff on our Heads Lane site (including Penshurst colleagues). This made for a great atmosphere, as secondary staff learned more about the teaching of phonics from their primary colleagues, and the primary team got to spend the morning in the Sixth Form centre, where I reminded them of the importance of their work (all the way back to when children are in nursery and reception) in developing the young people that occupy the Sixth Form centre each day. It will not be too long before our first 'through-school' student reaches the Sixth Form having spent all their school life within our single organisation. It is an exciting thought.

Finally, I have felt a renewed energy this week after a very relaxing Xmas and New Year break. We were fortunate to visit Sicily for the first time over New Year and it was a wonderful experience full of great moments, such as climbing Mount Etna (at least a little way), experiencing Palermo on New Years' Eve (not for the faint hearted) and even paddling in the sea in January. The kids absolutely loved it, and I can confirm that I did manage to visit Vitelli's Bar, the iconic setting for a famous scene from The Godfather Part 2. Another thing ticked off the bucket list.

This is a much shorter term than the previous one but absolutely jam-packed with activity and events so high energy levels are essential for all of us to bring our best to our school, and our students.

Enjoy the weekend and thank you as always for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### **WEEK 17 - Friday 19 January 2024**

The topic of 'accountability' has come up repeatedly in my work and thinking this week. Firstly, it is the theme of some work I am doing to secure my NPQEL (an executive leadership qualification for school leaders); in one of the sections, we were asked to think about how we create a culture of accountability, where people are held to account but where they also take responsibility for their actions, behaviour and crucially for their mistakes.

Then it arose again in some collaboration work I was doing with fellow Trust Leaders yesterday, where we explored the Nolan Principles of Public Life and, in particular, how we, as school and Trust leaders, accept accountability and ensure we have processes in place to hold ourselves, and others, to account.

Finally, after a bit of a gap, I have found my way back into watching old episodes of 'The West Wing' recently and was reminded of a quotation in the show which was attributed to an ex-mayor of New York who said, 'If a sparrow breaks a wing in Central Park, I feel responsible.'

That overwhelming sense of responsibility is something we all feel as school leaders, as we accept the presence of over 1400 young people onto our site each day, and a further 450+ at Peshurst and keep them safe and educated.

The dual notions of accountability and responsibility I find fascinating and although the two terms are often used interchangeably, there is a difference between the two. 'Accountability' relates to the outcomes of the work we do, e.g. we are accountable for the outcomes of the students we teach. 'Responsibility' relates to the actions we demonstrate e.g. we take responsibility for providing strong teaching etc. The ability to take responsibility also depends upon having the resources and the decision-making autonomy to be able to do a job and so there is a subtle difference between the two concepts. Crucially, it is in the space between those two where frustration of school staff and leaders often exists.

A good example relates to school attendance. We are held accountable for our attendance levels and do everything we can to encourage and promote it but ultimately the responsibility to come into school rests with the student, and parents. Similarly, we are held accountable for examination outcomes but often do not have the resources or specialist teachers to carry out our responsibilities to deliver high quality teaching and examination preparation.

We are not alone; these kind of pressures exist everywhere and especially in public services where expectations are high, but resources low. In education, one of the biggest pressures comes from Ofsted and there has been a lot of coverage recently of the new Head of Ofsted who has started work this month. Already, he is beginning to reassure schools that Ofsted's approach is going to be more empathetic to some of the pressures and issues I have mentioned above. Let's hope that is the case. Closing the gap between levels of accountability and the ability to take responsibility would be a welcome way to reduce the pressure on schools, and to solving the long-term problem of recruiting and retaining teachers.

On a loosely-related subject, it was great to see such a high turnout last night for our Year 11 Success Evening. The hall and canteen were packed whilst students and parents/carers waited patiently to speak to Heads of Department and other leaders about how best to support their child in the final weeks before the exams start. It was great to see so much responsibility being taken on all sides and a real boost for staff to see such high levels of engagement and support. Thank you to those that attended and to my staff who met with parents but who also organised and set up the event. It was great work.

Similarly, Year 11 students have also been attending Trust-led revision classes this week, held at the University of Hull. One cohort went out on Tuesday and other goes out on Monday. Lessons had been planned collaboratively by teachers across our schools and the feedback from the students was really positive with some wishing they could do it every week! Thanks again to all who supported this.

After a busy and cold week, I'm looking forward to a rest this weekend. I have some A Level Mock Exam Papers to mark and an outstanding list of unfinished work to complete but I will make sure there is time for rest too. I'm told by my kids that I am taking them to the cinema tomorrow afternoon and that we're watching 'Wonka'. I don't object; life is much easier when I'm told what to do on a weekend.

Whatever you are doing, enjoy it and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 18 - Friday 26 January 2024***

There has been a lot of discussion in the media in recent months about the breakdown in the 'social contract' between school and home which is an explanation for the lower levels of attendance seen in schools. There is no doubt some truth in this following several periods where the Government and school leaders were telling young people that they didn't need to come into school or that school wasn't safe for them. Whilst this seemed like the right thing to do at the time, we will probably look back on those decisions and recognise them as being mistaken. The long-term consequences on children's mental health and educational habits will take years to unpick and resolve, a situation made worse by the fact that funding for schools to do this work was nowhere near the level that was recommended by Sir Kevan Collins, who was actually appointed by the Government to investigate.

Despite this, there is clearly a Venn-diagram-type relationship between those students that are struggling to attend and wider measures of health and economic hardship. It would be easy to catastrophise the situation and write off an entire generation of young people. The reality is that current national attendance in secondary schools is around 92% - about 3% lower than it was before

the pandemic. And whilst this is a lot of young people nationwide, the overwhelming majority have made good adjustments and are thriving.

Attendance in our Years 9, 10 and 11 is not where we want it to be and we are working hard to put that right but those that are in school regularly are doing brilliantly. They have responded well to the changes in our behaviour policy and behaviour and attitudes are strong. Year 11 students in particular are showing a real commitment to doing well in their GCSEs in the summer; turnout to revision is high and over 120 of them have today enjoyed their breaktime in our sixth Form centre after receiving their formal offer to join the consortium Sixth Form on our campus. This follows over 80% attendance at the recent Progress evening and over 65% in attendance for the Success Event last week (which I mentioned in last week's blog).

In Year 9, we had the best ever attendance for that year group's parents evening last night with over 82% of parents/carers in attendance and this sets us up nicely for the Options Process, something with which the students are already engaging strongly.

I haven't mentioned Year 7 and 8 but their attendance is already above the national average and they're just fabulous!

This weekend is the final one of what I am now calling my 'annual hibernation', where I basically plan nothing and use the weekend to rest, catch up on work and get out for a run where possible. It makes for a dull January to be honest but the upcoming Spring offers plenty of reasons for optimism. The sun is shining as I speak and there is lots of laughter as the students outside organise themselves for a game of netball after school. Pretty soon, the nights will be noticeably longer, and the rugby league season starts! And here we go again.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 19 - Friday 2 February 2024***

The invention of the printing press is widely credited to the German Johannes Gutenberg in 1436; although, as with most things, many people believe that the Chinese had already mastered the ability to print using wooden blocks, as early as the 9th Century. Whoever did it, it transformed the world and enabled the development of mass reading.

The ability for us to read books opened the world to us. Not only could we read about the lives of other people, but this also allowed us to learn about other lands, cultures and periods in history. By reading a book, I can discover what it was like to live on the opposite side of the world, but also in different centuries or deeper in history. The joy and fascination of reading is one of the most amazing things to have impacted human beings in our history and yet sadly it is too often taken for granted and reduced to a functional skill.

I have spent some of my time this week listening to children read, mostly at Penshurst – our Primary phase within Hesse Academy. There is nothing more important in our curriculum than that children can read, and our intention is that they all develop this skill as quickly as possible to open the rest of the curriculum to them all.

To emphasise the importance of this, reading is the first thing that all of the Penshurst children do at the start of the day and at the start of the afternoon. Our youngest readers follow a well established planned curriculum called Read Write Inc – many of you may have heard about it and it is increasingly successful in enabling the children to develop the phonic skills to begin to read fluently.

Phonics was introduced into UK schools through the national curriculum in the late 90s and, as a secondary school teacher, it was never part of our training or work to understand what this complicated language of phonemes and graphemes actually meant. It was only when my own children started primary school that I began to understand it and appreciated the power of learning to read in this way.

The staff at Penshurst are highly skilled in delivering this knowledge and early reading there is becoming increasingly strong with increasing numbers of pupils passing the Year 1 Phonics test and the proportion being well above the national average. But we're not content until all children can reach this stage and the RWI programme is flexible enough to continue working with all children until they reach that level even if it takes them a little longer than others.

The explicit teaching of reading continues through the school using books of increasing complexity, including 'Who Let The Gods Out' which I have to confess I found utterly baffling! My daughter's school also use this book and it became our bedtime story book for a while before Christmas. We took it in turns to read but I could not understand the plot at all. I used it as an opportunity for her to summarise the story back to me at the end of each chapter, but I confess that I was thankful when we got to the end of the book. My daughter loved it though and was delighted when she found out that it was just the first of a four-book series, the rest of which she got for Xmas. Great.

But I digress. At the high school, we also set out to ensure that all children can read fluently to be able to access the secondary curriculum, but we also explore the different types of reading that they do, making them aware of the difference between skimming, scanning, inferring and so on.

Getting teenage children to read for pleasure is the ultimate goal of our reading programme and we recognise that this is much harder to achieve now when teenagers can access so much other 'entertainment' on their mobile devices. Nevertheless, we still have many many avid book readers who can be found in our library at social times or just sitting, lost in a book, amid the busy canteen at lunchtime. To further encourage them and others we will soon be launching our Hesse Canon – a list of fantastic titles which we hope all our students will aim to read before they leave our school; and they will be able to borrow them – for free – from our school library to do so.

My current book is The Bascombe Novels; the trilogy of books written by Richard Ford about the life of Frank Bascombe, a fictional man living in America. My wife asked me what it was about when she first saw me with it (the trilogy – in one book – runs to 1200 pages) to which I answered, "it's just about a man who starts as a sportswriter, then becomes an estate agent, then he retires. He gets married, his son dies, and he gets divorced and then he gets married again. That's about it, really. But it's really good."

"Sounds it," she said sarcastically, "I can't wait for it to be on Netflix!"

Which kind of proves my point that great writing, and the ability to read patiently, can bring any story to life and hold the reader hooked.

Finally, thank you for your incredible support so far this term. We have seen record numbers to events involving Year 9 and 11 this term so far and your engagement and support is really appreciated by all of my staff.

Enjoy your weekend and thank you again.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 20 - Friday 9 February 2024***

As we reach the end of the first half of the Spring Term, I have been reflecting on what we have achieved as a school since Christmas. The first thing I always consider is how our exam groups are faring.

For Year 11, they are doing well. They have completed a week's worth of Mock Exams this week and will finish them after half term. The attendance to school has been good and their attitude to their exams is really positive. We track them carefully and the data looks healthy; but of course, none of them have sat a formal exam yet nor submitted any coursework. In other words, there's still a long way to go and nobody is complacent. Next week, some of them will be back in school, completing work and keeping their learning ticking over; their commitment, and that of the staff, is impressive and makes me very proud.

Our Year 13 are one of the most focused and driven cohorts we have had for many years. The vast majority already have their conditional university offers and are now working hard to achieve the grades they need. It is a pleasure to be amongst them as I was in last night's Sixth Form Progress Meeting, where I held my own teacher conversations with the students in the class I teach. This is something I really value in my work and hope to always be able to find the time to keep teaching.

We've also been very happy with the continued improvements to behaviour, since we introduced our new behaviour policy in September and I thank you all for your support with this, as well as support with uniform standards. One area in which we continue to seek improvement is in punctuality at the start of the day. We have clear routines each morning which set the students up for the day ahead, and involve lots of PD work. If students arrive late, on a regular basis, this disrupts their preparation for the day and often causes problems later on. Punctuality is also a life skill and we see it as part of our responsibility to instil the importance of being in the right place at the right time if our students are to enjoy successful careers. It is also courteous and good manners to show up on time, wherever you are.

We expect all students to be on site and in their social spaces by 8.30am. At 8.31am, students sign in with our attendance officer instead and are then given a short lunchtime detention. If the school bus is later or there are extreme traffic and travel problems, then we take this into account. However, normal traffic is always busy at this time of the day and we urge everyone to set off in good time to ensure they arrive on time. Again, your support with ensuring that your child arrives into school on time each day is greatly appreciated.

The half term break will also mark, for us rugby fans, the start of the Super League season. As in every year, Hull FC start the season joint top and so I always enjoy this moment of optimism, which sadly doesn't usually last long! The season kicks off with a derby game at the MKM Stadium next Thursday and I shall be there with my son, and friends and their kids. My wife and daughter are heading to the in-laws in Surrey on Monday, leaving my son and I to spend some quality time together. His latest sporting obsession is darts. That suits me as I can still beat him at Darts! He has a week of sporting challenges planned for us, which includes golf (I'll be favourite), badminton (he'll thrash me), table tennis (him again), garden cricket (depends on the state of the pitch!) and the

darts. A proper compendium of sports. "A bit like Superstars?" I said to him, referring to the TV classic of the 1980s. He looked blankly at me. At least I know what I mean.

Whatever you are doing over the weekend and during half term, enjoy it and hopefully the weather will begin to warm up too, with Spring not far away.

Thank you as ever for your support this half term.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 21 - Friday 23 February 2024***

One of the most worrying patterns since the pandemic has been the increase in the number of young people that are being home educated. A long time ago, this was seen as something of a lifestyle choice made by a type of parent that possessed the resources, time and wherewithal to provide a form of education that they preferred against that on offer from local schools.

Recently, it has become a choice made by desperate parents unable to navigate the often-complex challenges of pupil disengagement, challenging behaviour and perceived unmet needs. Rather than the actions of a parent/carer who can provide effective education at home, it is often the path of least resistance for a family in crisis.

Last year, it was reported that an estimated 140,000 pupils in England were home educated at some stage, and it is likely that the figure has increased further since then. Further studies show that some of the poorest areas of the country have seen the biggest increases, such as Hartlepool, North East Lincolnshire and Knowsley. There have been similar if not so great increases in our area of Hull and ER too, and we have also seen an increase at The Hessle Academy, mostly in the secondary phase at Hessle High.

The decision to home educate your child is a huge one and we do as much as we can to dissuade parents from doing so, unless we are convinced that the parent is able to do it at least as well as we could in school. Several meetings take place before we finally take the student off our roll as ultimately it is the parents' decision. The Local Authority then take responsibility for ensuring that effective home education is actually taking place and it is common for students, within a few months, to return to school and usually to the place they came from. That has been the experience for us in most cases.

What can be done to prevent parents from feeling that home education is their only option?

Often the reason for the decision is a belief that the child's needs are not being met in school and these are often linked to Special Educational Needs. Delays in securing Education Health Care Plans from local authorities often give rise to attendance problems which then lead to the decision to home educate. It is a multi-stage problem that is characterised by a lack of funding in each setting whether that be the school or the local authority. In a world where the adults are trying their best to keep children in school, happy and thriving, it usually comes down to a lack of money and staff which prompts families to make what must be a heartbreaking decision. With the young person the one to suffer the most. Sadly, the size of the problem may be hugely underestimated as there is not a single register nationally of children that are not in education. This proposal for a single register has been promised by the Government for a few years and it is supposed to be part of a Schools Bill 'soon'.

I have written before about the changing 'social contract' that has weakened the expectation that children should be in school every day; this is a major cause of the lower levels of attendance to school since the pandemic. The home education issue is an extreme aspect of this wider problem which is going to take years, and a lot more resources, to fix.

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The first week of the new half term has gone quickly in a blur of activity. Our Year 11 students have now completed their Spring Mock exams and will now spend some time next week on improving practical and coursework. There are now just 9 weeks until the first 'formal, sit down' exam and they are determined to make the most of each of those days and hours.

Some of our Year 9 students and families were in school on Wednesday evening to hear about our fantastic Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, run by Miss Moore. This has been a tremendous success at Hessle since it was relaunched in 2019 and each year, over fifty students complete the Bronze Award, with some of them going on to the Silver and then Gold Awards. This contributes to our vision for developing learners with exceptional character and they also build great memories along the way too. If your child is interested in this programme, please ask them to speak to Miss Moore.

Finally, yesterday evening was the first half of our Year 7 Progress Evening where over 75% of parents were in school, meeting with teachers and discovering how their child was progressing in school. The increase in parental engagement this year has been really pleasing and we hope to see as many parents in school next week for the second half of the year group.

And then a reminder to parents/carers of students in Year 9 that our Pathways Evening takes place on Wednesday 28th February next week, starting at 6pm. At this event, you will find out more about the subjects that students will be able to select for study at GCSE. We hope to see you all there.

Have a great weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 22 - Friday 1 March 2024***

I write this, on Thursday evening, having just booked two tickets to see Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band in Sunderland in May. This will mean I will see him three times on the 2024 leg of his World Tour – something I have never managed to do on any previous tour and surely a sign of my recognition that this could be the last time.

Even better, on the night in Sunderland, I am going with my sister. Joanna is five years younger than me, but I have always been inspired by her utter love for life. At Christmas, after a few glasses of wine, we made a pact for 2024; she would come to a Bruce concert with me. And I would go to see Pink with her (she is nuts for her). I haven't fulfilled my half of the bargain yet, but surely will do when we get the chance.

When my son was a few years old, my wife and I spoke at length about when to have another child. We both have younger sisters, and we didn't want him to miss out on the unique relationship you have with your sibling. And so our daughter came along and the relationship they have together is a joy to watch; not always the best of friends but deeply besotted with each other in their own way.

Of course, we see siblings and twins passing through our school all the time and it is lovely to see their personalities develop and see them looking out for each other. The sweetest moments come

when a new sibling starts school in Year 7 and an older brother or sister suddenly starts to demonstrate a side to their personality which was hitherto unseen.

This week, we received the names of our new Year 7 intake and – of the 250 new students joining us – over 20 of them are siblings of current students. So, there will be plenty of protective big brother and sisters evident in September!

I have written before of the number of educational visits that my staff carry out each year and the great opportunities they provide to our students and, this weekend, we have another group of 40 students heading off to France. They left the site early Friday morning and will be back on Monday night. My wife (Head of Languages) is leading the trip and confesses that she is more worried about leaving me alone with the kids than she is about taking 40 other children to France!

This trip follows on the back of the most recent overseas trip for our Sixth Form students to New York as part of the joint Consortium Sixth Form College trip. Some of those students had never been abroad before and it is not an overstatement to say that those five days of independence will have been life changing for some. Whilst that group were in the USA, we also had a group of Sixth Formers heading to Stratford to see *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the RSC; another very special cultural opportunity, organised by Mr Burnett.

And just this week, our school was represented by our student leaders at the second annual TCAT Student Leadership Conference at Hull University. This event involved students from as young as four at our primary schools all the way up to some of our 18-year-old Sixth Formers. The theme was 'sustainability' and, speaking to one of our Senior Students (Joe Collins – Year 13), the event culminated in plenty of ideas for us to make our places of learning more environmentally friendly in the future. Great work by our learners and colleagues that organised it.

Finally, today marks the National Offer Day for Secondary Schools in England. Parents that applied for places at our school from September will begin to find out if they have been successful. By Monday, everyone should have been informed by the Local Authority and I will begin to communicate with our latest groups of families for what will become the 'Class of 2029' - the year that they will reach Year 11, or 'Class of 2031' for those that go all the way to the Sixth Form. I am delighted that we will once again be full in Year 7 and thank you for everything you do – as current parents/carers - to support us in making us such an attractive choice for parents and families to come.

Have a lovely weekend and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 23 - Friday 8 March 2024***

By the time the Chancellor started his budget speech on Wednesday, the headlines had already been leaked to the extent that we all knew about the 2% reduction in National Insurance. What I was looking out for was anything that meant we would see more money for schools.

Working within a Multi Academy Trust provides some protection from the worst of the financial shocks that can affect schools. For example, when the energy prices soared recently it wasn't me that had to try to find that money directly and I was grateful for that and being able to focus on educational matters.

Nevertheless, when school funding increases are not enough to cover inflation or the teacher pay increases, which are not always fully funded by Government, then the only alternative is to make cuts. The levers for making cuts are few in schools. Since staffing costs are nearly 80% of total income, and non-discretionary overheads such as insurance, energy etc make up such a big chunk of the rest, there isn't much wriggle room. The outcome inevitably ends up being larger class sizes and the closing of unfeasible subjects which only attract small numbers of students. Or – and this saves pennies in comparison – fewer textbooks or other resources. This is the reality that we are all trying to balance and have been for years. Real terms funding for schools (accounting for inflation) has barely budged since 2010 when the expectations on schools have grown hugely. I've written about this before, it hasn't changed, and this week's budget has done nothing to address those issues.

Thankfully, we continue to attract high numbers of students and, following on from the confirmation of our Year 7 intake last week, I had some good news from our Sixth Form team the other day. Interviews conducted with our Year 11 students indicate that a higher proportion of them will be joining our Sixth Form next year. The Post-16 marketplace is fiercely competitive and school Sixth Forms face huge pressure from much larger specialist colleges in the area. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of our students are choosing to stay because of the trust they have in our provision; they know, like and respect their teachers, they have a choice of a wide range of subjects through our position as part of the Consortium Sixth Form College and they know that we care about them as individuals and unique young people. This recruitment success further supports the whole school as it aids in the retention of our staff who see Sixth Form teaching as part of their professional development.

Next week is our second Year 11 Mock Results and Progress evening in which our Year 11s will be able to receive their Exam Results Envelopes for their most recent mock exams. Once they have digested these results, they move onto their appointments with their class teachers to see what they can do next to improve their chances in the summer. Last term, we had queues out of the door at the start of the night and we hope for the same levels of engagement again next week. Thank you in advance to those parents/carers of Year 11 students that have already booked their appointments – we appreciate your support.

Finally, a very Happy Mothers Day to all of our mums, mothers, Step Mums, Foster Mums, Grandmas, Nanas, Step-Grandmas and even Great-Grandmas. You all play such an important role in the work that we do, caring for and supporting our children and young people and ensuring that they can focus on their learning and development when they come to school. It is greatly appreciated.

This weekend, I will try to strike a balance between making sure our children can pamper their mum, which will also mean cooking a few nice meals, whilst also spending time with my own mum. I'm from Hull so that should be 'mam'. We will meet up Sunday, along with my sister for some family time.

However you are spending time this weekend, hopefully you can share it with family and enjoy whatever fine weather there may be. Thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

## **WEEK 24 - Friday 15 March 2024**

Occasionally, one of our students will ask me, "Sir, what do you actually do? I mean, I know what your job is, but what do you.... do?"

When I first started in the role, I spent much of my first few weeks speaking to staff to learn more about what they felt about the school, what our priorities should be. After a few weeks, I did sometimes ask myself, 'what else am I meant to be doing?'. It didn't last long and soon projects, issues, incidents, celebrations and events filled my diary. Being a Headteacher is a fantastic job and a real privilege. I get to see people at their best and worst, deal with everything from the trivial and the mundane (what colour decorations do you want on the Christmas Tree?) to the life-changing and tragic, when some of our students find themselves in highly dangerous and vulnerable situations.

Most of the time is just moving from one place to another speaking to people and generally ensuring that everyone has what they need to do their jobs to the best of their ability. Take today for instance. It began with a morning run. I have tried this year to get my exercise in early and it has definitely helped my energy levels during the day. After a 15 minute shuffle around the streets of Willerby, I'll get ready for work, have a coffee, chat with the kids and be in school for our Senior Leaders' meeting at 7.45. In this 15 minute slot, we check on staff absence or events that are happening during the day, make sure that all lessons and duty points are covered and prepare ourselves for the day. At this point in the term, the team are often operating on fumes, and it is an opportunity for us to take support from each other and pull together to lead the rest of the staff.

I quickly check emails for ten minutes and then put my blue coat on, grab my radio and go out on duty. I'm on the main gate monitoring students arriving from 8.15 to 8.35 and this gives me the chance to wish them good morning and keep an eye on the overall safety and movement on the site at the start of the day. The entrance to our school is a mixed user environment with buses, cars and pedestrians all sharing the same space. The main mitigation to the obvious risk is a 5MPH speed limit and plenty of staff supervision.

As students arrive they congregate in the spaces designated for them. Year 7s on the tennis court are the ones closest to my duty point and so I get to see how they look at the start of each day; always smart and well behaved which is good to see.

Tutors come down to these areas at 8.30 and by 8.35, students are going into the building for their tutor period.

My day today has been packed with meetings and planned phone calls so I squeeze in a quick meeting with Angela, my new Operation Manager. We planned the day, discuss priorities for next week. At 9am, I met with Claire Khan, my Finance Manager. At this time of year, we are looking to set budgets for next year so we spent some time making sure that we had a good idea of likely income and how we proposed to spend it. Our school has a budget in excess of £11million but the bulk of that is spent on staff salaries. Overheads consume most of the rest so there is not a lot of discretionary spending for Headteachers. Nevertheless, staffing has to be carefully managed as a few errors can cause a big problem down the line.

After break duty, I spent some time on the telephone to Mrs Preston, our Primary Head of School, discussing the progress made by our Year 6 pupils in their recent mock exams. They have done well in Reading and Maths, and we were looking at some extra support we can put in place to improve their writing skills. Leading an all-through school has meant a huge expansion in my responsibility and a widening of my understanding of primary education; similarly some of the methods used to

track and assess students at the High School are also leading to improvements in the primary stage. Friday is a busy day for duties so I was back on duty just before 11am for twenty minutes. A minor behaviour incident occurred which caused me to spend some time with the pastoral team sorting it out, before I was back to my office for a meeting with my Head of Sixth Form, Mr Jarman. Our Sixth form is a real strength of the school but there has been a drop in attendance recently of our Year 13s so we spent some time looking at the impact of the strategies he has put into place. This cohort were halfway through Year 9 when the covid pandemic started and faced two years of disruption during their GCSEs. Adolescence has not been straightforward for them at all but they are being well looked after and are on the brink of achieving strong outcomes before going onto their next destination which, for most of them, will be university.

After Mr Jarman left, I started writing this blog for ten minutes before going back on duty yet again where I also had my lunch standing up in the canteen. Fishcake, chips and mushy peas – you can't beat it!

There was a twenty-five minute break between duties in which time I squeezed in another meeting, replied to some emails, approved some staff ordering, set up an agenda for a leaders' meeting on Monday, added some messages to our weekly staff briefing and had another catch up with Angela.

The second lunch break gave me the chance to speak to our Year 11s, who picked up their Mock Exam Results last night at Progress evening. There were some glum faces when a few realised that they hadn't done as well as they had hoped. But – as we always tell them – there is still time to put it right. "The best time to start revising is at the start of Year 10," we say, "the next best time is right now!"

After duty, I gave a tour to a lady who has applied for a job in our pastoral centre. It is always a pleasure to show off our school and she was impressed at how quickly over 1200 young people can move around the building and settle into their lessons. Handing her over to my colleagues who were set to interview her, I headed back to my office to tie up the week. There is a staff briefing document for Hessle and Penshurst staff, which we aim to send out by close of play on Friday, this sets up the following week with key events and reminders and allows staff to get themselves organised for the week ahead so that they can switch off and unwind for two days. I write a short intro and make sure everyone else's content is clear and concise. By this time, it is 2.50 and the first students are beginning to leave the site. I head out to bus duty to see them all off, in exactly the same place that I welcomed them six and a half hours earlier. And I wonder where the time has gone, and what exactly it has that I have done!

I'm not quite finished as I then go to the main hall to cover a detention duty for a colleague who is still interviewing our prospective candidate. I tend to aim to leave by 4.30 on a Friday to get in a run before seeing the kids. Tonight, I am writing this quickly before leaving a little earlier in order to pick my son up for a dental appointment. Hopefully, we will be home by 5.30 and the weekend can begin.

I tend not to do any work on Friday night. Instead, I might open a beer and flop in front of the TV with my wife and kids, watching The Apprentice and then possibly whichever Super League game is on TV.

Tomorrow, we'll be at the MKM stadium for the Hull FC game and then spending some time relaxing on Sunday before getting ready for another busy week.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, find time to enjoy it and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 25 - Friday 22 March 2024***

Sport has been heavily on my mind this week, for lots of reasons.

Firstly, last weekend was one of the lowest points in my time following my team, Hull FC. I have supported the club since the 1970s and believe me we have witnessed some lean times in that period. But there are few games when I have felt so disappointed and bereft of hope than last Saturday as we were hammered at home by a team who were missing several players and hadn't won a game.

Watching a sports team fall apart like Hull FC did is a dispiriting experience and it calls to mind so many thoughts around organisational culture, team spirit and pride – things which I am always keen to learn more about as the leader of a large school. I am proud of the culture that exists at Hessle High and know that all of my leaders work hard to maintain it. It doesn't happen by chance and needs nurturing and developing intentionally. Clearly something is amiss within the culture at Hull FC and the solutions to the current situation will not be quick coming and there will be lots of hard work to get there. I hope that any of you that were there managed to enjoy your weekend afterwards – it certainly cast a cloud over mine.

This term we have had plenty of sporting success, both from our teams, and some of our individual students who take part in everything from boxing to tennis to swimming to dancing. Their successes are not always brought to our attention immediately and it is only when they become a regional or national champion that we get to hear about it. We really want to know about the interests of our students outside of school so please encourage your child to share any out of school activities or successes with their teachers and tutor. We love to celebrate this.

The sporting highlight then came from our Primary pupils where our Year 5 and 6 girls football team winning the Hymers College Open Football Shield on Wednesday. And well done to Clara in Year 6 who won the award as Player of the Tournament.

Another big event for the Hessle High Community this week was the World Down Syndrome Day on Thursday. And our wonderful girls Lara, Mia and Anya joined with their teaching assistants and other students to organise a bake sale to raise money for one of our charities 'Downright Special'. The cakes looked delicious (I'm sure you'll agree) and, although I wasn't on site during break, I'm told that someone has saved me one!

Although today is the last day of term, there is no let up in the activity. We have hosted our friends from the Prison Me No Way organisation, who are running lifestyle workshops with all our Year 9 students. This is a well-established event and challenges our 13/14 year old students to reflect upon the risks faced by young people in the modern world. It brings them into contact with several reformed prisoners who talk about their mistakes and life journey. It is a powerful day and always a popular one with students.

And finally, it has also been our Sixth Form taster day for Year 11 giving them the opportunity to visit one of our partner Sixth Form sites (Wolfeaton or Cottingham). For most of our year 11, their choice to stay in the sixth form is heavily influenced by the relationships they have built with Hessle teachers but there are equally attractive courses, facilities and talented teachers in our other schools too, which is the unique selling point of our Consortium College.

And so, a short but busy term comes to an end. After the weekend, I still have work to do so will be back in school for a few days next week. But, for the second week of the holiday, we will be in Spain. We are fortunate to have access to a house in Estepona, which is one of the most beautiful towns on the Costa Del sol, full of Spanish charm, a lovely beach and some great tapas bars and restaurants. The house has no wifi and a TV with only six channels (half Spanish and half German) so it is the perfect place to relax and unwind and spend some proper quality time with my family.

Whatever you are doing over the Easter holiday, I hope you find some sunshine and time to relax and thank you as ever for your ongoing support to my staff and I.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 25 - Friday 22 March 2024***

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The sporting highlight then came from our Primary pupils where our Year 5 and 6 girls football team winning the Hymers College Open Football Shield on Wednesday. And well done to Clara in Year 6 who won the award as Player of the Tournament.

Another big event for the Hessle High Community this week was the World Down Syndrome Day on Thursday. And our wonderful girls Lara, Mia and Anya joined with their teaching assistants and other students to organise a bake sale to raise money for one of our charities 'Downright Special'. The cakes looked delicious (I'm sure you'll agree) and, although I wasn't on site during break, I'm told that someone has saved me one!

Although today is the last day of term, there is no let up in the activity. We have hosted our friends from the Prison Me No Way organisation, who are running lifestyle workshops with all our Year 9 students. This is a well-established event and challenges our 13/14 year old students to reflect upon

the risks faced by young people in the modern world. It brings them into contact with several reformed prisoners who talk about their mistakes and life journey. It is a powerful day and always a popular one with students.

And finally, it has also been our Sixth Form taster day for Year 11 giving them the opportunity to visit one of our partner Sixth Form sites (Wolfreton or Cottingham). For most of our year 11, their choice to stay in the sixth form is heavily influenced by the relationships they have built with Hessle teachers but there are equally attractive courses, facilities and talented teachers in our other schools too, which is the unique selling point of our Consortium College.

And so, a short but busy term comes to an end. After the weekend, I still have work to do so will be back in school for a few days next week. But, for the second week of the holiday, we will be in Spain. We are fortunate to have access to a house in Estepona, which is one of the most beautiful towns on the Costa Del sol, full of Spanish charm, a lovely beach and some great tapas bars and restaurants. The house has no wifi and a TV with only six channels (half Spanish and half German) so it is the perfect place to relax and unwind and spend some proper quality time with my family.

Whatever you are doing over the Easter holiday, I hope you find some sunshine and time to relax and thank you as ever for your ongoing support to my staff and I.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

#### **WEEK 27 - Friday 19 April 2024**

Next week is the final week of employment for one of our most-admired caretakers. Roland 'Roly' Hunt will retire next Friday after seven years at Hessle High School. Before that, Roly spent many years working for BAe systems.

As Headteacher, I have always been determined to ensure that every individual working in our school feels valued for the work that they do, regardless of how unglamorous they may feel that their role is. I am pleased that nobody in our organisation prefaces their role with the word 'just' anymore; this refers to a time when some people would tell visitors that they were 'just' a cleaner, for example. Now I hope that everyone appreciates the role that everyone has in making our school great; keeping it clean is arguably more important than anything. And being a 'caretaker' is just as vital.

Nowadays, Roly's official title is 'Facilities Assistant', but I have always preferred the word 'caretaker' to describe their role, for that is what they do. They don't just look after and care for the building and our site, they look after their colleagues who work with them.

One of my first encounters with Roly was when I was walking across the car park in the pouring rain. As I approached my car, I realised there was a huge puddle around it where a drain had become blocked by leaves. I stopped and tried to figure how I was going to get into my car without getting my shoes and socks wet. Quick as a flash, Roly appeared from nowhere with a broom handle and strode into the water, getting his own feet wet through. He poked around the drain and soon the water disappeared. I was shocked and said, "you didn't need to do that, Roly."

"I'm already wet," he said, "no point you getting wet as well."

On another occasion, Roly won a prize in the Xmas raffle and, as he came up to collect it, the cheer from his colleagues was the biggest we've ever had; which truly reflected the affection in which he is

held by everyone he works with. Like the rest of his team, they are always to be seen lugging equipment and furniture around the site, but also carrying heavy bags for people, or helping them to jump start their cars, or fixing a puncture. Whatever it takes to keep everyone happy and productive – this is what they do.

I will miss Roly, and our chats about rugby league and how terrible Hull FC have become. But on behalf of everyone he has worked with and the wider school community, we wish him many happy years of enjoyable and well-earned retirement as he heads to the riverbanks to spend more time with his fishing rod!

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It has been a busy day around school day with a heap of different activities taking place.

First up was our intrepid Duke of Edinburgh Silver Award students, thirteen of whom were in school early, fully laden with their backpacks ready for their three-day practice expedition. This takes place (hopefully in drier weather) around Lakeland Park near Pocklington. These Year 10 and 11 students have been on the programme since Year 9 and the personal development that we see in the students that take part in this is phenomenal. As ever, our thanks go to Miss Moore, Mrs Edwards and Mr Scott who accompany them on the trip.

Also setting off were a group of Year 13 Geography students heading to Manchester for a weekend residential revision course, and a group of Year 11 PE students going off site for the GCSE Practical Moderation. So there were lots of comings and goings at the start of the day today.

Each of these trips takes a lot of organising and planning and, when our colleagues are out of school leading the trips, it often means that other colleagues are covering their lessons as well, so it is a real team effort to put on so many experiences and activities for our students.

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As the cricket season gets underway, last week we asked our son to check that his cricket clothing and equipment still fit him. It never does, and it is always quite comical to see his cricket whites wafting around his shins and him trying to squeeze his hands into his too-small gloves.

It is his 14th birthday next week and so we will be heading to Sports Direct in Hull tomorrow to upgrade his cricketing gear for the season ahead. He has played cricket since he was six and last year switched clubs to play for Kirkella CC, where he is a decent bowler and an enthusiastic batter. More important, he loves it, and we enjoy seeing him competing and trying his best, whilst making friends and spending lots of time on a sports field. The club have a nice little bar and it is not a bad way to spend a Friday night after a busy week at work, watching him and his mates training.

And so another week comes to an end, and we are already two weeks into the summer term. Hopefully, the weather will begin to warm up and stay dry and we can begin to enjoy the longer evenings before too long.

Enjoy your weekend and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

## WEEK 28 - Friday 26 April 2024

We have a lot of visitors to school at Hessle. Some of them are specialist educationalists who come into school to support individual students, or for specific tasks such as music tuition and others are obviously parents and carers. We are also pleased whenever our Governors come in (which is increasingly often) and we regularly host teachers, staff and leaders from other schools in our Trust, or from our Central Services Team. Finally, members of the business community also visit us often to share their expertise and experience in order to build the aspirations of our students and to offer careers advice.

Overwhelmingly, they are impressed by the way in which our students conduct themselves and how they interact with other adults, showing off our school values of respect and kindness. We hear positive feedback all the time and try, where we can, to share this with the students involved and their parents. To promote this, we have recently introduced 'Bridge Coins' - these are bespoke tokens that are given to all of our visitors when they arrive and for them to give to students that have particularly impressed them during their time in school. The students then receive a recognition letter for them to keep.

Our first recipients were Cleo and Phoebe (see below) who received their coins from a visitor recently.

"The Bridge" is our through-school Personal Development programme which supports our young people throughout their journey at Penshurst and then at Hessle. It encompasses a wide range of activity including assemblies, theme days and tutor activities. The name is inspired by our through-school and the transition we promote between primary and secondary phases; as well, of course, by the Humber Bridge and the notion of 'a bridge' being something that brings things, and people together.

In the weeks and months to come, I will share more of this work with you.



A reminder that next week sees some changes to our lunch and break arrangements with Year 10 and 11 swapping from early to late, and vice versa. This supports the scheduling of the GCSE exams which formally begin on Thursday 9 May. In between times, of course, there is also the Bank Holiday, when school will be closed on Monday 6 May.

On the Sunday before that, I will be in Cardiff for the start of Bruce Springsteen's European Tour. I'll share more about that next week but be assured that my running playlist has now been honed to what I hope and predict will be the concert set list. Before that, this is a busy sporting weekend with my son's cricket nets starting tonight, followed by his football match on Sunday lunchtime and then a quick dash to the MKM Stadium on Sunday afternoon to see Hull FC take on Leeds. Apparently, it is going to rain. Great.

Whatever you are doing this weekend, try to avoid the rain and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 29 - Friday 3 May 2024***

They say that 'a week is a long time in politics', and it has also been for us all here at Hesse Academy.

When I drove through the gate on Monday morning, little did I know that within a few hours I would have an Ofsted inspection to contend with. We knew that the inspection was imminent and were well prepared but the 'no-notice' element will always throw schools into turbulence. Suddenly, every plan that I had for the week was turned upside down and there was only one priority; steering the school, 1900 learners and 240+ staff through a two-day inspection. Technically, the inspection is not over until the final report is published (in a month or so), so I am unable to share with you the outcome. I would, however, like to thank you for your messages of support, and for the hundreds of you that completed the parent feedback survey which was overwhelmingly positive.

The atmosphere and team spirit amongst the staff has been awe-inspiring. In any inspection, a handful of subject teams do most of the heavy lifting and, for us, this was English, Maths, Geography and Art. So when those colleagues arrived at work on Tuesday morning, they found their staff rooms full of cakes, biscuits and treats to keep them going through the two days – all put there, by their colleagues in the other departments, to show their support and appreciation. What a team we have here at Hesse; it makes me so proud.

I can also say how proud I am of the way that the students (and the pupils at Penshurst) conducted themselves throughout the inspection. They were welcoming, polite and friendly to the three inspectors at all times and gave a fabulous account of themselves. I will be sharing that gratitude with them next week in their assemblies.

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Whilst the inspection took place, it was still business as usual and, on Tuesday, we hosted a group of trainee teachers from the Vantage Teaching School Hub. Between meetings, I popped over to Tranby House, where we were hosting them, to welcome them to the school, the Trust and the profession. I am always in awe of young people (certainly all younger than me) who continue to choose to work in the 'world's greatest' profession of teaching. It is bloody hard work and often thankless and stressful but to see energetic people keen to take on that challenge is humbling, so it was well worth my time going to see them, even during our inspection.

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As I mentioned in last week's blog, the highlight of this weekend for me will be on Sunday night in Cardiff when Bruce Springsteen starts his 2024 European Tour. My wife and I are going (she has become a fan over the years, by simply accepting she had little choice!) and we're going to break the journey with a night in Stratford-Upon-Avon tomorrow. After an Ofsted week, it has come at the perfect time.

Thank you again for all of your support during inspection and have a lovely Bank Holiday Weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 30 - Friday 10 May 2024***

The highlight of this school week has probably been our school production of Oliver! After a long hiatus following Covid, this is the first time for many years that we have been able to put on a full show such as this. And what a return it was!

The idea for this production was first put forward back in September when our drama teacher, Miss Foster, came to see me with a proposal. A cast of fifty, a professional set, full music score. It was certainly ambitious. And all I had to say was 'yes', and she would take care of it, with the support of the rest of the Performing Arts team; and the students of course.

Well, on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, it all came to fruition with three barnstorming performances which brought the house to standing ovations on each night. I was there on Wednesday with my family and both of our children absolutely loved it and my daughter (who has acting ambitions) was singing the songs all the way home.

There is something magical about live musical theatre. The energy, talent and dedication that lifts the words and notes from a musical script and translates them into a living and breathing performance is surely miraculous. Thank you to everyone involved, including all of the cast, the backstage crew and the staff for giving up so much time to prepare such a wonderful show.

This week also saw the first of our summer GCSE exams (RE on Thursday). In truth, students have been sitting GCSE assessments in form or another for months (coursework etc) but the reality of that first exam sitting in the sports hall is when the reality of it really lands. As ever, our Year 11 students have handled it with mature aplomb and they have reported that the papers so far (there have been two more today) were fair and accessible. We can ask for no more than that but I am always keen to remind the students are never 'easy'; if they find them so it is because they have worked so hard to prepare. We have fingers crossed for similar positivity next week and beyond.

Thank you for continuing to support our high standards of uniform. When the weather changes significantly, it often finds some students making their own adaptations to our uniform but they are quickly picked up by our staff and put right. Please ensure that you son/daughter continues to follow our expectations as this reduces distractions in school.

Although it was a long weekend last week, the long journey that my wife and I made down to Cardiff was well worth it for an absolutely stunning performance from Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band. This was my twelfth Bruce concert and definitely in the top three that I have seen. The band played for three hours, churning out the hits and deep cuts one after the other leaving me completely exhausted at the end (I really shouldn't be dancing and fist-pumping at my age!). The sun

is forecast to shine most of the weekend and so it will be a much more relaxing one for the Groaks, hopefully with some time sitting in the garden and firing up the barbecue for the first time this year.

However you are spending it, enjoy it, and thank you for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### **WEEK 31 - Friday 17 May 2024**

The Guardian newspaper this week ran a story that was headlined 'Teachers in England stretched by pupils' mental and family problems, MPs say'.

This was a report from the Education Select Committee that had heard evidence from those that work in schools, but it could hardly be described as 'news', for this situation has been going on for several years now. It began with the austerity period when council and public sector funding was cut, and it grew worse during the pandemic.

One of the reasons why the media and Government are playing 'catch up' is that it has been a 'boiling frog' situation, with an incremental increase in the demands placed on schools. Local Authorities, the NHS and the Police are all under strain and so the parent that cannot get mental health support for their child, or the student that cannot get a SEND diagnosis or the child that is being cyber-bullied, instead of turning to those specialists, they turn to schools, because we are the most accessible.

For those of us that work in, and lead, schools, it is the biggest problem we face, even beyond underfunding, shortage of staff and the perverse accountability framework.

The Labour Party are promising an extra 6,500 teachers which would be fantastic but, to recruit them, they will need to tackle the barriers to recruitment that currently exist. What's more, it isn't only teachers that we need and even the Guardian headline at the top of this blog refers only to 'teachers'. The reality is that the people dealing with this bulge in societal need are support staff such as pastoral managers, safeguarding leads and SEND co-ordinators – all of them highly trained and dedicated but most of them not teachers. And not, therefore, as highly paid.

The solution? More money for schools and for public services. It is no more difficult than that.

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Putting that to one side, it has been another busy week of recruitment for us at Hessle Academy.

After appointing a new Assistant Headteacher to join Penshurst Primary School last week, we have focused on Hessle High School this week with the appointment of a new Head of Department for History, a teacher of RE, a cover supervisor and an Assistant Head of Year. The latter two roles are support staff, confirming their importance once again.

We are in the 'transfer window' for teachers with the deadline of the end of May for anyone wishing to resign their contract and start elsewhere in September. It makes for a hectic period but we are fortunate to have lower than average turnover of staff. The roles described above comprise less than 5% of our total staffing on this site and so, barring a clutch of unexpected resignations next week, we will be able to plan our timetables for next year from a full staff once again.

Our Year 11 students continue to impress everyone with their maturity and resilience. The GCSE exams have come thick and fast this week, two per day for many; but they are taking them in their stride, accepting the support from staff and placing their trust in their teachers and the hard work they have all done to prepare. The feedback has been positive with most feeling that the exams have been fair and accessible. Another round of exams follow next week before a half term break and then two more weeks after that before they start to wind down. Thank you for your support of our students at this time.

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Dua Lipa, Olivia Rodrigo, Tate McRae. If I didn't have a nine-year old daughter, it is very likely I may never have heard of these singers. Like many people, as you get older, my musical tastes have become stuck in time, meaning that I listen to much the same music as I did twenty or thirty years ago. I like most genres, particularly soul, blues, rock and some pop. I even enjoy some jazz. Well, one album by Miles Davis to be precise, which I listen to most weeks. And of course, anything by Bruce Springsteen always features heavily on any playlist.

But my daughter's emerging enjoyment of music is a real joy and she has gradually introduced me to these artists, along with Taylor Swift, who I've obviously been aware of for years but whose music I had never really listened to. We like nothing more than sitting up on a weekend night and taking turns to play videos on YouTube. Through this, I have started to enjoy her music and she has even taken a liking to Springsteen. Well, some of his songs anyway and particularly 'the one where he dances with Monica' (see the Dancing in the Dark video from 1984, if you don't get that reference).

During half-term, we are going to Prague for three days as a family but also to see Bruce who plays there on the 28th May. I can't imagine anything more exciting than taking my kids to see The Boss. Our tickets are at the back of a large airfield, a long way from the stage, but more room for me to dance with my daughter. I'll be Bruce and she can be Monica!

Thank you for your ongoing support and have a lovely weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 33 - Friday 7 June 2024***

Nothing irks me more than to hear people who know nothing about education criticising schools and young people. But it has been a fortnight in which, sadly, politicians have resorted to this regularly in search of cheap applause or, they hope, votes at the General Election.

I am not surprised that Nigel Farage chose his first speech as a candidate in this election to blame schools for the moral decline of the country and the fact that one-third of under 35s aren't sure what happened on D-Day. How do you even begin to unpick that thought?

But even I was surprised to hear about the 'National Service' policy announcement that landed during half term, along with a Tweet from a Cabinet Minister which said, 'is it asking too much for young people to actually do something?' How dare he.

It might play to a narrow group of potential voters to characterise young people as feckless layabouts who need a bit of military discipline to show them how lucky they are; but isn't only offensive, it is just plain wrong. The young people that I know are overwhelmingly hard working. As soon as they are able, they take on part time jobs (essential to our service sector and economy);

they care about their friends, their families and the world that they are growing up. Unlike some people in other generations, they are respectful and tolerant of others and many actively promote causes that they care about and that make life better for others. Lots are active in sport, the arts or volunteer; many are young carers. Meanwhile, they worry about the world, the climate and their older family members who often cannot get the health and social care that they need; they are concerned about their own futures, the changing employment markets and their chances of ever owning their own home, or being able to enjoy a lifestyle at least as good as their parents. And they have to contend with technological innovations that others have created and sold to them which make their lives much harder to navigate, and then they hear people in authority bemoaning them and saying that national service is what is required to knock them into shape. Outrageous.

Unfavourable comparisons have been drawn to the D-Day generation but you could just as easily argue that it is the boomer generation (which probably includes myself and coincidentally most of the current political elite!) that fare worse by these comparisons; many of us grew up during the longest period of peacetime, when higher education was free, when the NHS met everyone's needs, when you could buy a house and retire at 60 or 65, and without the eternal pressures of social media weighing down on them. Our generation have had it the easiest and all we have done with that privilege is make the world harder for the next generations. So, to blame young people is wholly unfair and has certainly raised my blood pressure over the past few weeks.

And, on that note, I continue to be impressed by the way in which our young people conduct themselves in and around school. Exams are progressing nicely, the students are taking them in their stride and the young people in other year groups are showing the respect you would hope to ensure that their older peers can focus on their studies, by observing quiet areas of the school whilst exams go on. Next week, many of them are volunteering to support an Active Travel Campaign, aimed at encouraging more people to walk or cycle to school. Some of these students will be on Heads Lane in a morning handing out raffle tickets to 'walkers and cyclists' so that they can take part in a prize draw. Nobody has paid them to do this, or even had to persuade them. They want to do it because it is a worthy cause and ultimately makes the world a better, healthier place.

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Sadly, my short break to Prague during half term did not happen after Bruce Springsteen cancelled the concert having lost his voice. Whilst this was a disappointment, I have been lucky to see him twice this year and indeed saw the concert in Sunderland where the damage to the vocal cords was done. That show was epic; three hours in the driving rain by the end of which he was wearing just a t-shirt as he belted out the final numbers. You can see it here.

Seeing him on a wet Wednesday in Sunderland reminded me also of a damp Tuesday in Coventry when I saw him a decade or so ago. Of all the exciting cities and venues that he plays, these are probably fairly low down on the list. And yet, you would never know it. Springsteen was once asked why he plays for so long, and so hard, at every single show he performs. He replied that, "at each show, there are people who will be seeing me and the E Street Band for the only time in their lives. I owe it to them to give my best every single time I play."

That has always inspired me. And it is a message I always try to convey to my staff. The best thing about being a teacher, or school leader is that it matters. But the hardest thing about it, is that it matters every single day. There can be no let-up, no 'taking it easy' days. Our work is too important for that.

Next week, I will be able to share with you the final report from our most recent Ofsted inspection. I look forward to doing that and highlighting some of the tremendous things they said about 'your' school and 'your' staff and students.

In the meantime, have a great weekend and thank you very much for your support throughout the year.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 34 - Friday 14 June 2024***

I was delighted to be able to share with you the final Ofsted report following our inspection. Today, it has also gone live on the Ofsted website and can be found here.

Whilst I am delighted with the overall judgement and the comments made about the school, staff and pupils, we are putting the experience into appropriate perspective.

Our inspection was carried out under what is known as a 'Section 8' inspection which covers schools that are already classed as 'Good'. The inspection team was small (three people on day one and only two on day two). In that time, they had to observe in depth four subject areas and hold many meetings with staff, students/pupils, Governors and leaders. The volume of evidence that they must collect is enormous and they then have to distil this into a one (or two) word judgment. The chances of them getting this wrong is what causes so much stress for people that work in schools, especially headteachers. Especially if they happen to come on an 'off day' when we have staff absence or issues are rumbling amongst students. As happens.

In the event, we had a very professional and courteous team of inspectors with many years of experience that allowed them to establish a 'gut' feeling of how the school operated and was led. Of course, the evidence of our strengths was compelling as you will see from the report but that level of experience and insight on the part of the team makes the whole experience more tolerable. I genuinely enjoyed working with them and hope that all schools could be inspected by the same team. They were keen to listen, learn about our plans, our ambitions and our challenges.

So, although we are pleased with the outcome, we are not shouting from the rooftops because the most important judgement is what you, and our students and my staff think about our school; and in that regard, we have every reason to be proud.

The Ofsted Parent View site ([here](#)) is publicly available here and this is where the feedback that you gave during inspection can be seen. This is overwhelmingly positive and when combined with the feedback from staff and students, it is overwhelmingly so. It tells us that staff want to work here, parents want to send their children here, and most important of all, students are proud of coming here. Thankfully, this was captured in the report in the following statement which is the one I am most proud of:

"Pupils demonstrate a sharing and caring attitude. This plays a part in the calm and purposeful climate for learning in the school. Pupils feel privileged to attend the school, and staff feel privileged to work at the school."

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Yesterday, we said our farewells to Year 11 students in their leavers' assembly as they approach the end of their exams. I spoke to them about making sure they enjoy the moment; that these pivotal

times in their lives happen quickly and you only realise the importance of them afterwards. I also thanked them for their contribution to our school, for being such fabulous role models and such funny, interesting and engaging human beings. There was some sadness in the air but mostly I felt happy that my team had done their job (and much more) in getting them to this stage of their lives and ready to write their own next chapters.

Finally, I wished them well for the future with the hope that they go on and live amazing lives, savouring everything that the world and life has to offer.

I am so fortunate to do the job that I do.

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Last night, I was pleased to attend the annual Consortium Academy Trust Staff Awards event. This is the event's second year and is a great occasion which celebrates the dedication and loyalty of staff across our whole organisation.

Staff in every school are asked to nominate a colleague who deserves recognition and four are then chosen from each of our schools, plus our central services team. Every role within schools was represented from Deputy Headteachers to caretakers; exam officers to teaching assistants. It demonstrated the importance of each role within our schools.

For Hessle, our four winners were Michelle Edwards, Clare O'Loughlin, Richard Sellers and Mark Owen.

Michelle is our Personal Development Co-Ordinator but that barely describes the range of work that she does to celebrate and promote our school. Michelle is often the public face of the school, organising events for the students, raising money for school charities and providing steadfast support to Kate Moore with our highly successful Duke of Edinburgh programme. Michelle wasn't able to attend the event but she was a worthy recipient.

Clare is our longest-standing Head of Department and the best teacher I have ever seen. She has led the English team for many years, guiding staff and being an inspiration to literally thousands of students. This year, she has led the team through a number of challenges and yet has done it without complaint and with a determination to succeed. Her passion for her staff is infectious and she remains an absolute rock amongst our staff.

Richard is a hugely popular Physics teacher and new leader in the Science team. Students adore him for his passion for the subject and his dry humour but most of all because he likes his students more than anything else. He is also a great, supportive colleague and has recently been a mentor for new staff, putting lots back into the profession that gives him so much satisfaction.

Mark Owen is our Premises Manager, without whom the school couldn't even open. Nothing is ever too much trouble for Mark who sets the example of service that the rest of his team of caretakers follow. I am delighted that Mark has been chosen for an award as his service to the school and the staff often goes unnoticed – another worthy winner.

Writing these notes has made me even more proud of the school but it was also lovely to hear similar stories told about colleagues working across all our schools. We are very fortunate to be part of such a thriving community of people who are all 'shaping positive futures' for our young people.

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It will be good to get back to the MKM stadium tomorrow for a long overdue home game for Hull FC. Much has happened since the last home game back in May; and many of the team will be barely recognisable. My son is now a season ticket holder and part of the group of friends with whom ends that I have been watching Hull FC with for decades, and which now includes our kids. He is now as burdened with false hope and shattered dreams as I have been all these years! But we will turn up tomorrow hoping for the best. In total, it is a big sports weekend and we will no doubt watch the Scots tonight in the Euros, the England cricket team tomorrow night and then the England footballers on Sunday night. Chance of four wins for our teams? Slim, but we live in hope.

Whether you have any interest in sport, I hope you enjoy the weekend and the sight of some much overdue sunshine. Thanks again for your support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 35 - Friday 21 June 2024***

Firstly, apologies that this blog arrives with you on a Monday morning. Last week, time got away from us all and I was unable to complete writing this before we could get it sent to you.

In my first year of teaching, I remember that older hands would try to reassure me when I explained how I was struggling to balance the demands of the role. "Wait until the summer," they'd say, "and gain time."

I had no idea what this meant and had to be enlightened on this idyllic period when teaching apparently became so much easier, when lunch breaks could be properly taken and when – unbelievably – some of the teachers even slipped off to the pub at lunchtime!

The cause of this was the departure of Year 11 students and so all their scheduled lessons suddenly became free, and teachers wallowed in time for the above. For a couple of years, I too found myself benefiting from this time and it was lovely. Although I don't think anyone actually did go to the pub; even by the early 2000s, that was something well in the past.

Of course, you only benefited from this if you taught Year 11 (or Year 13) in the first place and so it was only ever something that a proportion of staff experienced. Somehow though, over the years, this 'gained time' seemed to disappear. Probably with the increasing and ever-changing accountability framework. Instead of being 'spare' everyone just used the time to prepare for the next year or for other activities such as celebration events, sports days, transition activities and school trips.

Our calendar in the last half term is choc-a-block with such activities and I find myself even busier in these last months of term than at any time in the year.

Last week, for example, our senior leaders spent two evenings reflecting on our year and constructing our Development Plan for next year. This week, I will be involved in interviews (for staff, and for Head Students) as well as spending two days out of school with fellow Trust Headteachers (Thursday) and the wider Local Authority Headteacher group on Friday. It is also our Year 11 Prom (Wednesday) and Year 13 Prom (Thursday). In the remaining weeks of term, we will also have our Year 6 transition, Year 12 Induction, new staff induction, Sports Day, two Governors meetings and a Year 10 Aspirational Dinner. So much for 'gained time'. But

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Last week saw the final exams for our Year 11 and 13 students and they have all, for now, left school. A good proportion of the Year 11 students will be back for Prom, for Sixth Form induction, for results day and then, in September, back in our Sixth Form. But for many, last week will be the last week that they ever spend a significant time at Hessle High School, as it will be for our Year 13s.

The past few weeks have seen some lovely moments; farewell assemblies and shirt signing but also the very personal moments where a student arrives at a classroom door with a bunch of flowers, a box of chocolates or a card for a teacher that has left their mark on a young life. I always find these very touching. And they are appreciated by our staff more than you could possibly imagine.

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Finally, I spent much of the weekend watching sport. Firstly, I was at the MKM on Saturday afternoon enjoying a much-improved Hull FC performance despite losing to Warrington. And then I was at Kirkella Cricket Club for most of yesterday watching my son playing for the senior Sunday team. He was one of three juniors, who all did really well playing against the men, each of them contributing to a win, including my son who took his first wickets in senior cricket. It barely seems any time at all that he first started playing 'All Stars' cricket, aged 6. His involvement in cricket means that I spend most of my time at games explaining the rules to his mum, or his grandma, so that they can enjoy it too!

However you spent your weekend, I hope you managed to enjoy the sunshine which looks to be hanging around for another week. Thank you for your ongoing support and have a lovely week.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 36 - Friday 28 June 2024***

The theme this week has been 'Proms'. Whatever you think about the concept of a school prom, it is definitely a big event in the life of most 15-16 year olds and, as Hessle's previous head, Sarah Young, once told me, 'whatever you do, don't ever be the Headteacher who cancels the Prom!'

And I haven't. Even during Covid we managed to put on the 2021 Prom on the school site, although sadly the 2020 Prom was cancelled entirely. Since then, and since the demise of Willerby Manor Hotel, we have moved the event around a little but this year it was held at the Mercure Hotel in Willerby and I am confident that we have now found a home for this event.

The students certainly fed back that they enjoyed the venue and, on a lovely night, they made full use of the large garden at the back of the hotel, filling up the picnic benches, sitting on the grass and enjoying the tree swing and giant games. The focal point of the Prom is probably the arrival when they all turn up in their finery and their chosen modes of transport (party bus, flatbed truck and horse drawn carriage stood out this year). It is at this time when most of the parents, siblings, grandparents are there, as well as many staff. For several years now they have also been serenaded by Mr Sellers and his swing band who provide musical backdrop to this part of the evening.

During the event itself, Mr Leckenby and Miss Wilkin worked hard to ensure that all the students had the best time and then there was plenty of fun as the awards were read out. The 'Best Teacher' is also much-coveted by the staff and, this year, it was Mr Compton who scooped the award, not only for his work teaching Maths but for also leading the boys' rugby team for the past few years.

The next night it was on to the Year 13 Prom at Social on Humber Street. This is a slightly different occasion as you would expect but nonetheless a great time for students and staff to celebrate together at the end of years of support. There were similar awards for students and staff once again and Mr Compton this time picked up an award for 'the teacher most likely to come to school in his slippers!'. I told him that I don't really wish to know the story that sits behind that award!

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At this time of year, it is imperative that we continue to maintain high standards of uniform and general conduct. I am delighted that students have responded well to the recent hot weather by continuing to wear normal uniform unless told otherwise. I am extremely proud of our very high standards of uniform across the school and know that this is only achieved with your support. Thank you very much.

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Last Monday, all our staff came together for a Celebration Tea following the publication of our Ofsted report. Cleaners, caretakers, support staff, teachers and leaders were all there to share in the success of the year to date. I firmly believe that everyone that was present plays their pivotal part in the success of our school and so it was with great pride that I thanked them for their contribution. If you haven't yet read our report, please do so here.

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This weekend I fulfill my half of the Bruce/Pink deal that I struck with my sister at Christmas. Tomorrow morning, we are heading up to Glasgow to see Pink in concert. My sister has seen her multiple times, but it is my first time. I have tried in the past few days to familiarise myself with her music and – as is often the case – I have realised that I knew quite a lot of her songs anyway! So I am looking forward to getting 'the party started!'

Enjoy the weekend and thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

### ***WEEK 37 - Friday 5 July 2024***

It was nice to see that the first MP elected last night was the lady destined to become the next Education Secretary. Bridget Philipson will be the first Labour incumbent since Ed Balls in 2010. In the intervening time, there have been an unbelievable 10 Tory SoS Education Secretary in 14 chaotic years for the sector.

In the past few years, there has been little appetite for change amongst the Government which has been both a blessing and a curse. A blessing because we could barely stand any more radical change; a curse because the change that we do need – more funding, a change to accountability and reform of Ofsted was never going to happen in the last years of the Conservatives.

Education has not been high on the agenda of Labour either and it is unlikely that we will see drastic change or funding for some time; although their promised Ofsted change will probably mean we will never see a one-word graded judgement again as a school.

But where I am hopeful is that Labour are committed to improving public services more broadly. The work of school staff has grown and changed over the past fourteen years, and radically so since the

pandemic. The years of austerity left public services under-capacity to deal with existing, and growing, need and I have written several times in this blog that schools have become the front line of public service for many families, for whom we just happen to be the most accessible.

We are held to account for how well we provide for our students that are disadvantaged by poverty. To that end, my best hope for the new Labour Government is that they stop putting so many children into poverty in the first place. Then we can do the work we are best equipped to do.

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This week has been Work Experience week for our Year 10s, the first time we have held this for some years. To give you a flavour of what they have been up to, let me share the message that Mr Scott sent me after going out to visit some of his tutees in their placements:

“The students have all done our school and themselves so proud. It has been brilliant going to see them out of their comfort zone and getting stuck into the world of work. They haven't just been making teas and coffees and sweeping, they have been out measuring carpets and curtains for brand new homes, they have been putting orders through for car and motorcycle parts, they have been very professional with the public when chatting to them while they having their hair done or gone for a catch up with a friend in a coffee shop, they have been making burgers and other BBQ staples, they have been learning to service and use cranes, cherry pickers etc. The students that are placed in schools have definitely had a taste of what it is like on the other side of the classroom and working with children. They have been listening to children read and helping them with their Maths and Computing skills, they have helped with sports day, one has been sat with a challenging student all of the time to support them and has found a new appreciation of how the teachers feel when they play up. Overall, it has been an absolute privilege to go and see our amazing young people do something that will benefit them not just next year but set them up for the world of work. The employers have commented on how fantastic the students have been and have asked me to pass on that message. As their form tutor it has been brilliant to see them grow from the end of Year 7 in covid bubbles to young people getting an idea what their future might look like. I even got a free coffee to keep me going through all the visits, which was much appreciated!”

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This weekend I shall be hosting my leadership team at our house for our annual summer BBQ. I am quite proud of my barbecuing skills and am looking forward to showing off some of my marinated steak cuts, which will hopefully be eaten outside. Although, looking at the weather forecast, we may all end up huddled in my kitchen. By 5pm we will be anyway as we will be watching the England football game.

Whatever you are doing, I hope you find some sunshine.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Mr Groak

Headteacher

***WEEK 38 - Friday 12 July 2024***

Yesterday I was at the Trust's final meeting of Headteachers and Directors of Service and we were asked to reflect on our highlights for the year. I had two, which were:

May 2nd – the day after our Ofsted inspection and I am standing in front of the staff at 8.15 in the morning. There are many tired faces in front of me but there is also a pride and satisfaction in the room. I have never been a great sportsman but have had the good fortune to meet and speak to a few people that are. What they have always told me is that there is nothing to replicate the emotion of being part of a team, especially after a great win. For a moment, I had a sense of what that feels like. The pride in ‘a job well done’ was palpable; I felt a similar feeling at the end of the first Covid year when I knew we had done remarkable work for our students and community. That day in May will remain a cherished memory for me, amongst many others, of my time as Headteacher.

June (Prom) - at the end of our Year 11 Prom, I am standing outside of the Mercure Hotel in Willerby, chatting to the mum of Anya Findlay. Anya has Downs Syndrome and joined us back in 2019. Because of the collaboration between school and family and our staff's sheer determination to support her, Anya has remained with us all the way through Ks3 and Ks4, playing a full role within a mainstream education setting. Anya has taken part in the Duke of Edinburgh programme and just about every other event we have put on, including Christmas concerts and school productions.

Mrs Findlay started by thanking the school staff for everything they had done to support Anya, but I also expressed my thanks to Anya and them, for I am convinced that her time in school has made us an even more empathetic, inclusive and considerate place. Without Anya, it is unlikely that Lara and Mia (two other amazing girls who never let their Downs Syndrome condition get in the way of loving life) would have followed and, without them, we would not have had the confidence to bid for a Cognitive and Learning ERP. Our success in doing so (the only one in the East Riding) means that we can continue to support young people like Anya in mainstream schools for many years to come.

So Anya has truly left her mark, as have her parents, and thanking them for their support and faith in the school was a moving moment.

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This week has been our transition event for our new Year 7 students. For those of you that have children in this cohort, you should be very proud of how they have conducted themselves this week. The manners they have shown to each other, to staff and to other students has been exemplary and I hope they have enjoyed being here, as much as we have enjoyed their company. The most impressive moments have been to see new friendships developing and those who may be the only pupil from a particular school being wrapped up in new social groups and taken care of. Truly Hesse values of kindness in action. Thank you to those parents/carers who have supported us with this and to those that attended the presentations on Wednesday afternoon.

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The final weekend of the term will be a busy sporting one for the Groaks. Tomorrow, I will be at the MKM Stadium for the Hull FC v Hull KR Derby, along with my son and my dad. Three generations of Hull FC fans hoping for a win. On Sunday, my son continues his senior cricket career with his third appearance for the Kirkella Sunday XI and then, of course, on Sunday night we will be in front of the TV like the rest of the country to see if England's footballers can finally 'bring it home'. I hope that all of our students and families can find the time to watch it; it could be a historic moment and I expect to see some weary looking students, and staff, when they return to school on Monday morning. But I'm sure it will be worth it.

Thank you for your support and enjoy the weekend.

Mr Groak

Headteacher