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Dear Parent,

This letter comes to wish you all a very happy Christmas and to thank you for your support over the last few months. It has been a quite extraordinary term, with the elation of re-opening in September, after six months away, rapidly followed by dismay at what we couldn't actually do. The first few cases of Covid-19 saw large numbers of pupils having to self-isolate while the cases since half-term have proved to be far less disruptive. Nevertheless, since September, I have found myself crossing off each day that we get through without a case, on my very own Advent Calendar; in so doing, it has certainly felt a very long term! Happily, and most importantly, all those who have been infected have made a full recovery or are making one.

The pupils have been frankly amazing, as they have coped with everything thrown at them from a new daily routine, to temperature checks, extensive cleaning regimes, social distancing, restrictions on where they can and can't go, as well as ultimately being required to wear masks in lessons. They have also lost so much from the fact that there have been no concerts and live drama performances as well as no sports fixtures, social events and school or house excursions. Despite this they have approached life so positively and with so much enthusiasm that they have been truly inspiring. The staff have also shown tremendous resilience, commitment and adaptability and I am extremely grateful to them for 'keeping the show on the road'. Saturday afternoons have shown us that there is more to sport than just matches, whilst our remote learning provision has helped those having to self-isolate, and our international pupils, many of whom headed home at the end of November in order to complete their quarantine before Christmas. I send all of them our warmest wishes and look forward to seeing them in January.

The cancellation of last summer's examinations has led to a slightly different dynamic in school and dare I say a little more urgency from those in the exam years. This more urgent approach is obviously encouraging but there is also a downside since colleagues report greater anxiety in the school; this is something that we continue to monitor carefully. Fortunately, the statement made earlier this week by Dame Glenys Stacey, Ofqual's Interim Chief Regulator, has helped. In it she stated that 'I do not see any prospect of us relying on, retrospectively, work undertaken by students, because students tell us they regard this as unfair because at the time they were doing that work they weren't doing it for the purpose of assessment'. The mock exams in January are important though and I would encourage the Upper Sixth and Fifth Form groups to prepare properly for them over the holidays, while also giving themselves a break. Lastly, twenty-one applications were sent off to universities by the early deadline of 15 October, with fifteen to Oxford or Cambridge.

Public performances in dance, drama and music have all been decimated, and no external matches have taken place either, but there has still been plenty going on. I am indebted to all the staff involved for running these activities, from the smallest to the largest. In music, the Lower School and Barron Prize competitions took place, while we also had online versions of the Autumn Concert and the Carol Service. The Lower School Dance Show is being recorded at the moment and I was delighted to attend a live performance of 'Chat Room' in the Memorial Hall. I am also pleased that the GCSE and A-level devised pieces were able to go ahead earlier

this term. Finally, I would like to thank our sports staff who have been out every Saturday and have managed to keep levels of motivation high, despite the lack of external competition. I do hope that public performances and matches will return next term, along with parents as spectators. We may even have missed Parents' Evenings in the Memorial Hall; but then again, perhaps not!

The latest Dauntseian, which can be found on the website and in hard copy at school, features news of many of these activities and so much more. It also gives us a reminder of what life was like pre-COVID. My thanks go to Ben Sandell and his editorial team for producing a fine publication and summary of the last academic year at Dauntsey's.

Sadly, as many of you will have heard, Mark McFarland has decided to retire in July 2021, after eighteen years of outstanding service at Dauntsey's. One of his favourite expressions is that 'no-one is irreplaceable', and this may be true, but not only will I really miss him personally, but so too will our school community, whether they have seen him for good news or bad over the years! Andy Collins has been appointed as Mark's replacement, having come through a very strong field of seventy-five applicants and three rounds of interviews, to emerge as the unanimous choice of the selection panel. Andy was educated at King Edward's School, Bath and Swansea University where he graduated with a degree in History. He then took a Diploma of Social Anthropology at Lincoln College, Oxford, where he also held a Major Stanley's Scholarship and was awarded two Blues. Andy spent seven years as a professional rugby player and taught at Monmouth Boys' and Abberley Hall Preparatory Schools, before spending five years at Gordonstoun as a Housemaster. Latterly, Andy has been at Millfield School since 2014, where he is currently Assistant Head and the Designated Safeguarding Lead. He manages their twenty-three housemasters/mistresses and spent a year as Acting Deputy Head. He is married to Teresa, who is a Chartered Accountant in Bristol, and they have three children aged 18, 16 and 12. We look forward to welcoming Andy and his family to Dauntsey's in September.

It just remains for me to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. In my final assembly of term, I asked your children to treasure their friends and family and to think about others this Christmas. I look forward to hearing some good reports from you, hopefully in person, on this initiative next term. I also hope that as we bid good riddance to this current year, 2021 will bring a successful roll out of a vaccine and a return to happier times.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Lascelles