



28 April 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

**Re: 'High stakes vs low stakes' (April 2023)**

With all the strikes going on across the country currently and the disruption due to extra Bank Holidays coming up, it can be hard to maintain a sense of rhythm and routine whether that be as simple as getting to school on time or taking part in the ongoing cycles of the year, such as the seasons, holidays, birthdays, exam cycles and religious festivals such as Easter and Ramaddan that I outlined last month.

This month, members of our school's Sikh community have been celebrating Vaisakhi, a spring festival. It is a day to celebrate 1699, the year when Sikhism was born as a collective faith. In 1699, Guru Gobind Singh chose the festival as the moment to establish the Khalsa - that's the collective name given to Sikhs who've been baptised. The story goes that at the festival, he came out of a tent carrying a sword and said that any Sikh prepared to give his life for his faith should come into the tent. Five men disappeared into the tent, and the Guru came out, alone, with blood on his sword. This worried the crowds, until the five men then came out from the tent unharmed and wearing turbans. They became known as Panj Piare or the 'Beloved Five', the first members of the Khalsa. They were baptised by the Guru who sprinkled them with Amrit, which is the Sikh word for holy water. This ritual became the basis of the Sikh baptism ceremony.

Since Easter, students have engaged in a range of high profile and low profile activities. The Duke of Edinburgh expedition was brilliantly executed with students receiving high praise from people they engaged with. Whilst walking, they came across a very poorly member of the public and thanks to their quick thinking and World Class skills, saved their life! I could not be more amazed by the humble manner in which they acted. Our Year 11 football team are playing in the Telegraph schools cup final at the CBS Arena on Tuesday and whatever the outcome, I know they have conducted themselves in a manner that demonstrated true courageousness and determination. Our debating team attended a regional debate and public speaking competition this week. It was reported that they spoke with real conviction, stepping up to the challenge having never done anything like that before. One student got an honourable mention by the judges for their speech on why they think that the current format of examinations are not fit for purpose and should be abolished. Another student volunteered to do the 'post-it' challenge and talk for as long as they could on an unseen topic without hesitation, deviation or repetition. We have taken delivery of a free piano that is now sitting outside under the canopy by reception for students to play at lunchtime. This will encourage them to have fun with music and perform in front of their peers. All of these exciting endeavours have been made available to all students in just the past two weeks so that they can engage in a wide variety of high and low stakes opportunities, which will build confidence. This is so important as too often we focus on the high stakes of assessment processes in schools, such as public examinations. As I tour Year 11 lessons each day, it is clear students are calm, settled and focused on last minute preparations.

With the King's coronation a few days away, we will be celebrating not only what it means to live in a modern Britain but also acknowledging how rooted in history we all are, whether that be due to our religion, our family, sport, or love of culture such as music.

Enjoy the upcoming Bank Holidays.

Yours faithfully,

Mr C Bishop (Headteacher)