



Headmaster's Start of Year Letter

24th January 2022

Dear Parents, Carers and Senior School Students

Welcome

Happy New Year to all and welcome to the 2022 school year! For new families, welcome to Blue Mountains Grammar School! Whilst none of us have had a Summer, with actual sunshine, I hope that we have all had a break from the rigours of 2021 and are feeling relaxed and ready for a fabulous year of learning. This year, like every year, will be filled with wonderful possibilities for us all; students, families and staff. As in every other year of Grammar's rich century of history, this year we will work together to meet whatever challenges come our way to ensure that our students flourish.

Whilst students have been preparing for the start of the school year, so too have the BMGS staff team in many and various ways. The School Executive had a wonderful planning day, followed by an equally fruitful day of reflection and collaboration with the wider Leadership Team. These teams spent their time discussing and exploring the possibilities that are before us and how this year we might enrich the experiences of our students. We also commenced the induction of new staff and are now part way through a four day whole of Staff Conference in which staff teams of every kind have been provided time for collaborative planning and preparation so that by Day 1 they will be ready to make our students feel welcome and engage them in learning. Finally, we plan to pause to celebrate Australia Day on the 26th before greeting our students from January 27th.

Staff Matters

During this time, we have welcomed new staff who are introduced to parents and students in the Heads of Schools' Start of Year communications. We are very blessed to have each of these educators join us and I look forward to the connections they make with students, the learning they facilitate and the additional value they bring to our School community simply because of who they are.

In 2022, the School has again aligned leadership, not only with our vision but with our current needs. This restructure requires that I introduce to you some new members of the Executive team.

- Mrs Rachael Newton, our new Head of Junior School has connected very quickly with the Junior School staff and has impressed us all with her expertise and her own special brand of joyful energy. Mrs Newton brings with her tremendous experience in school leadership and management and a wonderful pedigree in the implementation of the IB program, which overlaps substantially with our own educational philosophy.
- Mr Chris Sanders is our new Director of Pedagogy and Innovation. Mr Sanders has deep experience in leading Primary Schools and working with Principals in the management of change. His role will see him supporting, coaching and mentoring teachers across the Junior and Senior School in the challenges they face in their practice and their own professional learning.
- Mr Steven Coote, our new Director of Strategic Growth has led two previous schools as Principal. Whilst assisting Mr Sanders in the support of teachers, Mr Coote will also work with the Head of Junior School and the Senior School Heads of Department and Heads of House to assist them in responding to the School's priorities and implement change initiatives in their sections.

I am also very pleased to be working alongside Mrs Alicia Michielsen in her new role of Dean of Curriculum and Mrs Jacqueline Haines as Director of Student Culture and Character Development.

In the holiday break, I received notification from Mrs Suzie Goodlet that, in order to reduce the length of her working week she had taken a part-time role at another school. Mrs Goodlet has been a faithful, long-serving member of our Junior School and we are very thankful for her commitment and the quality of her practice throughout her time with us. Despite the challenge of finding high quality replacement staff over the Summer, we have been very fortunate that Dr. Elissa Drew, another excellent educator, alumnus, School parent and faithful servant of the School (usually as a volunteer) is excited to commence the year on Stage 1 at Wentworth Falls.

HSC Achievements

For yet another year, I am proud to commend our most recent graduates for their outstanding HSC achievements. This particular cohort of students experienced more distractions and obstacles and sat their exams later than any previous HSC



cohort. They required more courage, more focus, more patience and more perseverance and it is of these character traits that we are especially proud. Through the turmoil of 2021 they excelled and have now been rewarded with some exceptional HSC results. I congratulate every student, many of whom achieved well beyond their expectations. It speaks volumes for their dedication and the incredible support they received from their teachers. We are not only proud of our 42 Distinguished Achievements and the 24 students who received recognition from the NSW Premier, but of every student who exceeded reasonable expectations to post a personal best. We congratulate the 2021 Year 12 cohort and look forward to hearing of their further successes!

Enrolments

I am very pleased to announce that for the second year in a row, we have filled the Year 7 cohort and have higher than usual enrolments in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten. There is a waiting list in Stage 3 and we have incremental growth in some other cohorts where there are vacancies. These are all positive signs for the School and an indication that many students and parents are telling good stories about their experiences here at Grammar.

COVID-Safety

For almost two years now, I have been proud of how our parents supported their children's learning whilst managing COVID complexity. I have been proud of how our teachers learned the comprehensive suite of skills necessary to facilitate high quality at-home and online learning. I have been proud of how our students optimistically embraced the many variations to their routines and approaches to learning. I was also proud of how teachers, parents and students worked together in partnership to achieve the best outcomes we could and protect our community. Due to the leadership and diligence of the 2021 COVID-Safety Planning Committee, the teamwork of our staff and the cooperativeness of our students and parents, our School community navigated 2021 without COVID-19 entering our community. Again, I thank our students and parents for engaging with our COVID-Safety planning documentation and aligning yourselves with the School's approach.

As community attitudes, standards and practices evolve, I ask that you continue to engage with the information we make available and to cooperate with the measures itemised in School documents. Parents and students may find this [NSW Government website](#) informative. The School has embraced information from various sources, and the first version of our COVID-Safety Plan for 2022 can be viewed [here](#). For those at Grammar in 2021, the changes from last year are highlighted. Readers will notice in this Plan that QR Codes are a thing of the past for schools and that the School is no longer required to monitor the vaccination status of visitors, including parents. Whilst staff must be fully vaccinated, all visitors are welcome on campus, regardless of vaccine status, as long as they follow our COVID-Safety Plan.

COVID Surveillance

The School is required by Government to facilitate the participation of staff and students in the NSW Government's program of COVID surveillance testing using government-supplied Rapid Antigen Home Test (RAHT) kits. Unfortunately, the School has not yet received its shipment. As soon as we have, we will advise parents of the process by which they can pick up their allocation of RAHT kits. The School's COVID-Safety Plan outlines our approach to managing this program.

John Cunningham Student Centre

The generosity of an alumnus benefactor and our whole community, especially our parents, in making donations on our inaugural Giving Day in 2021 has made possible the renovation and extension of the Stratford Building into the John Cunningham Student Centre. After a significant COVID-delay, we have re-engaged our architects to recommence planning. The Student Centre will house all Senior School student services including Student Reception, counsellors, pastoral staff and Learning Enrichment educators. It will also become a casual hub for use during lesson breaks and meal breaks. Construction will commence as soon as possible and, we hope, be completed mid-year.

Start of Year Events

At the start of the year we would typically have a range of social and orientation events for parents and staff to get to know one another. This will not be possible this year, at least at first. We will accept parents on site in small numbers for necessary functions, however we will not bring parents on site where avoidable. Where possible we will seek to replace these events with online adaptations. Heads of School will communicate these details at a later time.



Communication

The links below provide access to the start of year letters from our Heads of School. These contain information pertaining to 2022 and particularly to Term 1, especially the first few days. I hope this information makes Term 1 very smooth for your family as you begin or continue your partnership with us.

- [Letter from the Head of Junior School](#)
- [Letter from the Head of Senior School](#)

Finally, if you are unable to access the information you require and remain unsure of who to speak to or how to handle a concern, please call the School Office or email our administrators (feedback@bmgns.nsw.edu.au). They will be more than happy to assist in managing your enquiry or concern.

Salutation

For the second year in succession, I remain committed to the principles the Apostle Paul outlined in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. In writing to the First Century Corinthian church, he encourages them to live in unity and uses the metaphor of a body; many parts but one whole. The BMGS staff team are a body and each individual brings unique gifts and talents to the team. Parents, students and staff together are also a body; we each have different functions, but rely on one another for the effective functioning of the School. Again this year, my hope is that we do as the Apostle suggests and prioritise unity and facilitate it by following "the most excellent way" described in 1 Corinthians 13 ... and love one another!

Warm Regards

Ian Maynard

Headmaster

Blue Mountains Grammar School