

REACHING OUT

Reflecting on the last three terms, two of which the Merchiston community has worked remotely, it was hugely reassuring to see how our community, in spite of the challenges it faced, still remained outward looking and supportive of those around us, both near and far.

From the very first lockdown and during the first significant spike in the pandemic, the School made its facilities and resources available to the NHS, offering accommodation to front line workers unable to be at home. As well as this, we allowed our school grounds to be used by patients at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital who were unable to find places to safely exercise. Our Chaplain, Rev Nick Blair, reached out to all in the Merchiston and Colinton community, offering daily message and thoughts for the day, and ensuring that our stayed connected.

In addition to supporting the boys with their distance learning, sport, music and other activities, a number of colleagues found time to deliver food donations to community hubs and supported the distribution of food parcels to vulnerable families. Merchiston staff also volunteered to help the local school specialising in teaching young people with additional support needs by delivering learning and teaching materials to their doors across Edinburgh.

Our boys were equally willing and ready to give their time to support charitable causes, even at the height of the lockdown. In June, we teamed up with St George's to cycle/run/walk from Edinburgh to Bulawayo in support of Our Neighbours Community Project in Zimbabwe, raising significant funds for vital work undertaken in a region that faces huge challenges at the best of times. Our VI Form boys, who ordinarily would have visited Davidson House to help the elderly residents, took to writing letters and recording musical performances for the residents to enjoy, and the letter writing initiative was also extended to our Merchistonian community as well.

As the first lockdown eased, the efforts did not stop; a number of our boys took individual initiative to raise funds for charities close to their own hearts, raising pledges by undertaking such challenges as 24hr multi-events and 3-day long distance cycle rides to name but a few; they even managed to encourage the odd staff member to get involved as well!

Throughout the Michaelmas term and into the second lockdown, the boys remained committed to thinking of others and helping where they could, culminating in a School-wide Kilt Walk in support of The Cyrenians, a local Edinburgh based charity who work with the homeless in the city. Each house taking to their feet and walking some impressive distances to raise money. These took place early this term, just as school resumed on site and the event itself was almost a celebration of our ability to be together as a community again, but at the same time supporting an incredibly worthy cause.

This is by no means a comprehensive list, but in itself it demonstrates the willingness of all associated with Merchiston to think beyond these walls.

It has been a huge source of admiration and pride that for me that in spite of everything else, our community has thought of others and played its part in helping those for whom the last 18 months have been an even greater challenge. To all of the boys, parents, Merchistonians and colleagues involved, I say thank you and well done.