

Sophie Head Student Review 2021

My name is Sophie and I was recently a head student. Studying during the past year has been challenging but manageable with the right support. When I was working at home, the regular zoom classes were invaluable for keeping me on track. This was reinforced with frequent email exchanges between myself, other students and most importantly our teachers who were great at supporting our learning; keeping it as normal as could be but also allowing us the breathing room required for the adjustments that came with working from home. For example, I was able to ask for extensions on projects if something prevented me from completing the work such as sharing a computer with siblings. This was also accompanied with a healthy dose of humour that made studying more enjoyable, with us sharing our experiences of working from home with our peers.

We then came back for the few months before Christmas which was a nice grace period where we were gently reintroduced to learning on the school site with our teachers and peers again. This was, however, one of the hardest periods academically and socially, with the step up from AS Levels to A Levels being obvious, and with the lockdowns continuing outside of the classroom meant we couldn't have a distraction when home. The uncertainty surrounding examinations during these times was also emotionally exhausting as we didn't know what we would be expected to do at the end of the year. There was also the threat of our class work possibly being used as evidence for our grades, putting extreme pressure on us to perform constantly. This was eased somewhat by the school's promise to do what was in our best interests, should it be left to the school to decide. I also want to mention the excellent communication between the Headteacher, Mr Collins, and the parents. My parents and I would receive an email the same day as any announcements which would usually summarise what that meant for us and what Mr Collins and the staff intended to do to support us which reassured us no end.

It was eventually decided by the government that we would have in-school testing and assessments. This came as somewhat of a relief as we would be tested by people with our best interests at heart, but was also quite scary as it meant that there was no real room for error. The teachers would do their best but this would mean taking more assessments earlier than in previous years. I was predicted an A in criminology, a grade 6 in anthropology, and a B in geography. This was above the requirements of my chosen course of Ancient History at the University of Reading which was reassuring, but also meant that the pressure was on for these exams. We went into the exams knowing we had to provide the evidence that we were already at the grade level predicted, as the school had made it clear that they would not be able to give us grades that we had not already proved were the level we were currently at. Whilst I believe this was probably the fairest way for teachers to assign grades, I do feel that it didn't take into account the stress and pressure that this year had placed on all students and didn't reflect what many students may have been able to achieve if COVID hadn't happened. However, I am currently awaiting my results and believe that I will achieve the grades necessary to go to university in September 2021.

The skills I have picked up from attending Knole Academy and specifically being a Head Student here have already proved to be invaluable to me. I find speaking in public to be significantly less intimidating, my ability to communicate with others has improved massively, and my confidence in myself has become one of my biggest strengths. Not only has being a head student taught me how to connect with my peers as a leader, it has enabled me to become confident in my ability to communicate our needs to people in positions of authority as well. This is mostly down to the Governors meetings my fellow head student Immer and I attended. We were asked to relay our opinions on the running of the school and were asked how we thought Knole had supported us

throughout the year. It was an honour and a pleasure for us to talk to them about this topic, as it was the main reason I had applied for the role in the first place - to make a real change in the way students and staff worked together. It also gave me a great insight into how schools and organisations like ours can operate and was really helpful for me in terms of deciding what kind of involvement I wanted to have with the school in the future. I signed up with Future First to take part in the Knole Alumni network and am really looking forward to the opportunities I will be able to offer and receive from working with Knole Academy in the future.

All in all, Knole Academy has been an amazing experience for me. The staff have been so supportive for the last 7 years and especially raised their game over the course of the pandemic. The skills I have picked up from attending Knole Academy will stay with me for the rest of my life and will serve me well. The mentoring I received from the senior staff at the school has been immeasurably useful and I am so grateful for having the chance to study with them. The opportunities offered to us by Knole have also been amazing, including NCS and taking us to the Sevenoaks District Youth Conference. I was introduced to this in the beginning of year 12 and have since created a committee called the Sevenoaks District Youth Assembly with my peers. We have already made a measurable impact on the young people in Sevenoaks, with us running our own virtual assembly at the end of last year. I really feel I have left my mark on both the academy and Sevenoaks itself.