

Covid Scola Regia 2023

In this, the third edition of the pandemic series, RHS Club's immediate past-President Ian R C Cowie interviews School Captain and Rector Pauline Walker.

Iain Dunlop

Ian Cowie asked: What has the last three years been like for you?

It's been interesting, and the RHS has given me lots of opportunities. Working from home was difficult, but made easier by the iPads; Frequent Zoom and Teams calls like this one also helped. Then back into school wearing masks was very odd, unreal, but this last year, with my captaincy, has been a privilege. Asked how much he was affected by the total lockdown, he said he was in S5 at the time, and managed, but those particularly in S6 may well have been badly affected. It was tough, but we found ways to connect. I missed the assemblies; my predecessor Jessica got just one I believe, whereas I had the luck to have many.

Some things have changed forever...the one-way system in corridors and stair is definitely an improvement. Asked about the move away from ties and blazers, Iain said that he has grown to love the full uniform, but understands the social and comfort reasons for the move to less formal garb, particularly for the younger pupils. The change in assessment processes (in place of exams) was not ideal, but in any event I think there are more changes to come in this area in the future. Iain holds the view that continuous assessment is probably a fairer system – one final exam of a couple of hours isn't a fair assessment of a pupil's ability. He also said that the bond with teachers, which he feels has been pretty strong throughout his school life, was not affected adversely by the pandemic. Asked about his overall experience of the RHS, he said that in his early years, he took part in many sports and extra-curricular activities, enjoying them all. Later, during the pandemic, the school and teachers supported me very well, helping me through my exams. The last year (as captain) has been an eye-opener in terms of seeing just how much goes on behind the scenes.



Asked about his future tertiary education and possible career paths, he said that at the end of S4, a teacher asked him what he had in mind in this respect, he thought perhaps medicine, following on of his cousins, but the teacher asked "why not engineering"? and that's what he's chosen – a bio-mechanical engineering course at Strathclyde. Ian Cowie finished by thanking Iain for his contribution to the RHS during his school life.

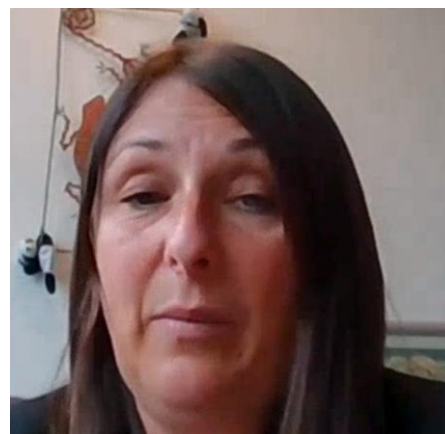
Pauline Walker

Ian Cowie asks Pauline: Is Covid a thing of the past – anything put in place for the pandemic which is now permanent?

A new normal, we haven't gone back to 2019, we've innovated and changed, and I think improved. We learned a lot about ourselves, and society – as we have done over the last 900 years.

For the better – uniform – our pupils learned that comfortable clothing (i.e. not blazers), also not changing for PE, which has given 100% participation in that subject. S1 to S3 not blazers, older pupils especially S5 and S6 like blazers, which are available for loan. PG and Leavers ceremony now split, which will be permanent. More digital learning, following Covid requirements. Outdoor classrooms (some funded by FP's) have been well used. HM Inspectors gave us a good report – 14 Inspectors for a week.

We have gaps in our teaching staff – there's a negative perception in the press, with strike action; sad as teachers can change lives. We have the longest teacher working hours in Europe – hopefully the powers that be will address these issues. School is expanding every year – 1400 roll next year, with 380 in first year – an expansion, hopefully opening next January, of 8 classrooms, toilets and offices on what was K Block – and getting our front playground back, which has been a real loss of social space (there have been temporary teaching portacabin classrooms there for a few years). Now 100 teaching staff, up from 85 when I started.



Many extra-curricular successes, particularly debating and a great variety of other activities.

Ian then thanked Pauline and said he was looking forward to join her at the PG and leavers ceremonies where he was delivering the Former Pupils address.