

15 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

As we get to the end of week two, things are continuing to go extremely well with our live learning offer. Students are doing really well online and have got used to the new routine. I have written to them today on their school email address to congratulate them. Our teachers are doing a sterling job and our Learning Support Assistants are supporting students really effectively in lessons. Parents are continuing to give us warm feedback on our efforts and I always pass this on to my colleagues when they do so. One or two parents have asked teachers if they can join the Google Classroom so they can help their children with the learning. We must say no to this due to safeguarding reasons. Most lessons are recorded so an alternative way to help is to go through a lesson your sons or daughters have found tricky with them later, using their Google Classroom.

As our online school develops we need to be mindful of the amount of screen time each lesson has. We ask our teachers to think carefully about this to give their own eyes a rest, as well as that of our students. With this in mind, we are asking our teachers not to teach live in the latter part of the day of the 21st and the 28th January respectively. This is because they have parents' evenings for Years 11 and 8. We will also be asking students to work independently of the computer for some sections of certain lessons to make sure that they too are avoiding headaches etc.

The generosity of parents' comments has kept us all sustained and happy as we work to deliver our online school. A number of you have also asked how you can help the school and its students financially at this difficult time too. We are usually very conservative in this respect, believing in the principles of state education, but the messages we are getting acknowledge that we are a community, that some families have been suffering financially during the pandemic and that others want to help, particularly with the fair distribution of devices and ensuring that all have the ability to learn from home. Four families, who will remain anonymous in this newsletter, have already given generously and have done so in the hope that others may wish to follow suit. With this in mind we will be writing to you next week to let you know of an appeal we will be launching.

Personal safety

In these unusual times please can we ask that you remind your son or daughter to be aware of personal safety if they are exercising alone outside, particularly on these dark evenings. Students should perhaps not wear headphones to ensure that they are aware of their surroundings at all times. Form tutors will also be reminding students of this in their Google Meets.

Year 11 and 13 Parents

As with last year, we understand that this is a time of uncertainty for students and parents in these crucial year groups. We still don't know exactly how GCSEs and A Levels will be assessed this year but a consultation is about to be launched by Ofqual. In his letter to Ofqual, the Secretary of State stipulates three things which are salient to this newsletter.

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1. Students should be taught for as long as possible (so they have every opportunity to catch up).
2. A teacher's final judgement on a student's grade ought to be *as late as possible in the academic year* (to maximise remaining teaching time and ensure students are motivated and engaged).
3. Students may be asked to sit some sort of examination or test.

This means that teachers in this school will not be submitting grades to exam boards until at least May. Therefore, there is no need to treat the current predicted grades on the Year 11 report or the most recent Year 13 report any differently to a normal year. Put simply, these are not the **final** grades that will be submitted to the exam boards. The grade that will be submitted will be an assessment of the standard a student has reached by May and not before. If a teacher discusses a **current** predicted grade at the Year 11 parents' evening next week, students and parents should be mindful that this can go up as well as down, depending on how the student performs in their learning for the rest of the academic year. Last year we received some correspondence from parents who pointed out that students were informed they could receive x grade but ended up with y grade which was lower. This happens every year and is usually a reflection of the teacher saying what they could achieve if they reached their full potential. Thank you for your understanding at this uncertain time. If we proceed with this understanding, teachers will be able to have less guarded discussions with their students at Year 11 parents' evening and both Year 11 and 13 students will be able to talk to their teachers openly without teachers fearing that they are being pressured into telling them their final grades.

BTEC

The DfE has announced that scheduled assessments for Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) will **not** take place in February or March this year. So, for those students studying the BTEC Level 1 or 2 in Health & Social Care, this means that external assessment will not go ahead in February.

Pearson assure us that they will put arrangements in place for students who are unable to take their external assessments to ensure they are not disadvantaged. Those who are expecting to complete this year will be able to progress normally.

We expect Ofqual to publish a consultation on arrangements for issuing grades this year for regulated VTQs, as well as arrangements for external assessments due to take place in May and June.

Please see this link for Pearson's statement: [Update on VTQ assessments](#)

Finally, thanks for your continued support once again. We have never felt closer to our families and our community than we do now, despite our physical separation. For my part, I want to thank all those key workers in our parent community. We have them all: nurses, clinicians, doctors, paramedics, scientists working on the vaccine, police officers and fire fighters, train drivers and delivery drivers, school staff and PPE providers and many more. Together you are all working to keep our society moving at a time when we all need to pull together.

Have a lovely weekend and rest those eyes if you have been working from home all week!

Yours sincerely



Alan Henshall
Headteacher