



5th January 2021

Dear Parents, Carers and Students,

To begin with, I hope you are well and thank you for the positive way you have engaged with our on-line learning. Before last night's announcement we hoped on-line learning would be with us for just a few weeks. But we now know it will be with us till at least half term. Given some of the Covid transmission rates, it has to make sense. But it still took me slightly by surprise as no doubt it did you. But probably like me, any surprise was also accompanied by a sense of huge frustration and disappointment. However, we've got to believe things will get better and we must find positive ways forward.

From the last lockdown we learned that what students missed most was the interactivity of live lessons. Hopefully the switch to live lessons through Microsoft teams will address this.

Students also said how much they missed that sense of camaraderie or "esprit de corps" that comes from being part of a student body. We looked to address this through some of our on-line activities like the "2.6 Challenge" and "Bridgewater Talks." We now intend to introduce more innovative and interactive ways people can work collaboratively on-line to share ideas, thoughts and hopefully their laughter and friendship. After all, without this wider dimension to the school experience, learning can be a slog and we don't want that at any cost, Covid or no Covid.

January is typically a month of resolutions and our New Year's resolution is to keep students as motivated, happy and engaged as we possibly can. An important way to achieve this is by having established routines and habits, something that can easily slide under lockdown. Therefore, we are working hard to provide you with as clear a pathway as we can to half term so that week by week you can tick off those important milestones in terms of academic progress and wider personal development. We will be involving our student council with this which gives me great confidence that it will prove a success; I will write to you later in the week with more details.

In terms of GCSEs, we had some clarity in that the Prime Minister said: "it's not possible or fair for all exams to go ahead this summer, as normal" but added that the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson will work with regulator Ofqual to put in place "alternative arrangements"; as yet we don't know what these are. This may cause some worry and anxiety but my reassurance is that everyone is in the same position across the country. I also believe we are as well placed as any school to implement such changes successfully and fairly. In the meantime, what we can conclude is that whatever system is adopted, the work Y11 students do now, when they come back and in the lead up to the exams, will be of immense value, importance and significance. So, if you are in Y11 in particular, hold fast, stay focused and keep up the work hard.

We were gearing up for mass testing this week and it's not entirely clear where we stand with this now. What is clear, however, is that we have now trained up our in-house Testing Team and set up the Testing Station. We also have a good supply of tests and PPE alongside an army of volunteers ready to support us. So, in this respect we are good to go and in preparation for this I will send out details tomorrow of how to provide consent and details of what the tests involve so we can hit the ground running whenever necessary.

Finally, I will try to avoid overloading you with communications. But I'm sure you appreciate that there's a full school calendar of events that can't stand still just because of lockdown, so we will do all we can to keep you fully informed of any alternative arrangements we are making.

Regards

Tim Long

