

5<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

### **Coronavirus Update 32**

I had expected that my next letter to you would be an introduction to our proposed COVID testing centre. Instead of this tentative venture into new territory, however, we all find ourselves back on more familiar ground.

The school will remain open during normal hours to the children of critical workers and certain other groups. There were forty of them with us today and they should now be familiar with how their attendance will be organised. Please continue to let us know day by day of any changes to the list. It is important that we know exactly whom to expect.

School transport will continue to operate as it did today. Our kitchen will provide lunches that have been ordered in advance.

All of the students had already been expecting to have their lessons online for at least the current week. That will now continue until further notice; the Prime Minister suggests this is very likely to be until half term at the earliest.

I expect that you, like the teaching staff, go into this lockdown considerably the wiser for last year's experience. Some impressive work was certainly done – as the weekly Gallery showed – and I have little doubt that a proportion of all students already know how to make the most of their opportunities whilst studying online.

During the months of normal schooling we have aimed to make everyone aware of the habits and methods underlying these successes. We should all be going into this lockdown prepared better than we were last time.

To be more specific:

1. We now know much more accurately which students have had to struggle because they lacked suitable IT equipment. Most of the gaps among members of Year 9 and the older year groups have since been plugged. Quite a few still remain among Year 8 and we are alert to any government measures which may help to meet these needs.
2. Attendance at timetabled lessons is a vital; it is every bit as important as attending lessons in the classroom. We can now register online attendance much more effectively and identify any emerging problems. We intend to telephone you as it becomes necessary. We will be hoping to learn what it is that causes each case of poor attendance. Where it is something that we can address, we shall.
3. On the school website we have brought together practical guidance and support. You will find it by clicking on Remote Learning Support. It is written for parents as well as students and I hope that you will find time to look at it.

4. We all know that engagement and involvement, so important in school life, become more difficult in the virtual world. We all have to work harder to make it possible. Please encourage your son or daughter to play their part; please also continue to keep the school and its staff in mind whenever you think a discussion may be helpful.

Finally, I am all too aware that our exam candidates in Years 11 and 13 have suddenly been deprived of their target. That is bound to be unsettling until we know what will replace it. Surely, however, any system of assessment is going to reward the same basic qualities: industry, knowledge, understanding and skill. Do not neglect these during the weeks ahead.

I wish you all a safe week.

Yours sincerely,



Natalie Waters