

Dear Parent/Carer

I have been trying to send you updates only when necessary so as not to bombard you with information, especially as it has been changing so quickly in the past few days (I have rewritten this email a number of times!). However, with developments that have been taking place this week I know that you will be wanting an update.

Before I go into detail, I want to reassure all of you that at the heart of all the decisions we are making lies the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff and students.

## **Will school be open to more students?**

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As I informed you in my last communication, we have been doing what we can to plan for the possible expansion of the numbers of students who will attend school. So far this has been focussed primarily on sourcing hygiene supplies to ensure that if there are greater numbers of students in school we can maintain the guidance on safe hand washing. We have also been working with our caterers to look at how food service will be carried out as schools also need to be able to provide food for attending students.

These are the easy wins. Harder is looking at how we will maintain social distancing in the school, especially in our 1930s classrooms and in pinch points such as toilets and corridors. In a large number of our classrooms this means group sizes of approximately 5. We are still working on the systems that we could implement to ensure that we can conduct safe movement of people and maintain social distancing.

I would like to focus on some facts that are most relevant to you as parents:

- There is no current requirement for any pupils to attend school and non-attendance will not be sanctioned.
- Currently there is no indication that any students will be expected to return to school before September, with the following exceptions:
  - Children of keyworkers and vulnerable students
    - who are already being catered for in the partial opening that Balshaw's has maintained since the start of the lockdown.
  - Year 10 students
    - who are likely to have some form of enhanced contact before the end of the school year.

It is important to note that whilst the majority of students will still be working from home, the work that will be done in school will also reflect the home learning that is taking place. It will not be the case that students are taught lessons. The guidance produced by

the DfE suggests that students are allocated their own desk based in the same classroom with the same member of staff for the day.

Given the increased risk of transmitting infection and the fact that students will have less access to IT or freedom of movement than they currently have at home, there will not be many students to whom this appeals. However, it may be that if your child is struggling to print work, or doesn't have access to IT facilities, they may wish to attend school for one or two days per week to supplement what they are doing at home.

## **Questions that parents of Year 10 pupils may have:**

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### **If Year 10 return to school, will it be safe?**

It will be as safe as we can make it, ensuring that social distancing is enforced. There will be a lot more detail produced on this when it is appropriate to do so.

### **What will it look like?**

We have got a plan in place that is taking shape that would enable us to begin some teaching for Year 10 classes. It is likely that this may involve one house group (a quarter of the year) attending school for one day per week, with an additional day to provide further intervention for those students whose lack of engagement with remote learning means that they need more supervised time to catch up.

### **How will their GCSEs be affected?**

We don't yet know at this time. All students nationally are in the same position and have the same concerns as you. The hope is to get you learning again as soon as it is safe for you and the staff in the school. There may be a reduction in the content that needs to be covered by the exam boards or some other mitigation, but as yet we don't know.

### **I have had an email/text message from Mr Morgan**

Some of you will have received either an email or an additional text, asking for a response to concerns that we have about the lack of engagement with work from some students in Year 10. It is imperative that we are able to communicate with you on these matters and if you have received one of these messages and not yet responded, I would urge you to respond to Mr Morgan as soon as you are able.

## **I have had to apply for Universal Credit**

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We know that some families have had to apply for Universal Credit during the lockdown. If so, your child will now be entitled to Free School Meals. If you have questions about this and how you go about applying for Free School Meals then please contact our Finance Office.

## What happens next?

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We will keep open, as we have been throughout the lockdown, to the children of keyworkers who are unable to safely stay at home and we have also been welcoming students by prior arrangement who have difficulty accessing the IT resources and need to spend some time each week in school. The school is also providing respite for vulnerable students who benefit from some time in school.

We will probably know more on the 28<sup>th</sup> May when the government looks again at the plans to open schools more widely. At that point I may be asking for you all to complete some online forms to indicate whether you would send your child in, how they would travel to and from school, whether or not your household is self-isolating and so on.

In the meantime, I continue to be overwhelmed by the support and positivity of our students and their families during this time. It really does bring out strengths and solidarity in people. Know that all your families are being remembered in prayer by many across the Balshaw's family and within the community of St Andrew's.

Kind regards

Mr Steven Haycocks