

Dear Parent/Carer

It has been a rather turbulent few weeks and days. There have been three versions of this communication to parents which I have begun and then had to abandon! The news that we are going into a full lockdown again will be distressing news for many, however, it is clear that the number of additional transmissions of the virus that would have taken place if schools had opened fully would have led to an even more dramatic rise in the R rate than the NHS could handle.

My good friend who is a respiratory specialist at St Thomas Hospital in London finished a 13 hour shift at the weekend where there were multiple Covid fatalities and walked out to a crowd of unmasked protestors chanting "Covid is a hoax." It saddens me greatly to think that there are still people who fail to see the reality of tragedies that are happening every day and the sacrifices that families and individuals are making as a consequence of Covid.

I'm sure that your child will be feeling a sense of disappointment that they are not returning to school and I'm sure many parents a sense of dread as responsibility for checking that their child is undertaking their remote learning and helping them out with their learning. Hopefully, if we have a successful implementation of the vaccination programme the start of the next academic year in September will be much more normal. I feel most sorry for our Year 11 students who are now in a bit of a limbo without clear guidance on what is happening. One thing is clear - the best thing that all of our students can do is to ensure that they keep on top of their learning and work as hard as they can do develop their knowledge and skills as it is going to be a very competitive job market out there when the economy starts to build again.

Anyway, let's get down to some of the practical things that you need to know.

Remote Learning:

- Remote learning will begin for Year 11 this Thursday 7th January.
- Remote learning for all other years will begin on Monday 11th January.

How should my child organise themselves for Remote Learning?

- Your child will have five lessons per day as per their timetable.
- They will need access to a PC/laptop or at least a tablet (more on this below).
- Remote Learning is not an 'option'. Staff will contact parents if a child is not engaging with their online learning. They may be required to attend supervised remote learning at school.
- Documents/information/worksheets that support their lessons will be available on the OneDrive area that they have access to with their school email and which will be linked to in ClassCharts.
- The teaching element will be delivered in two ways:
 - Some live Teams meetings for which your child will be provided a link. These will be to introduce a topic or to model a skill.

- PowerPoint presentations with commentaries and other interactive elements.
- The learning will then be consolidated through activities that are then done by students (tests, quizzes, written answers/essays) that should be submitted to your teachers.
- Feedback will be given to classes about common strengths or misunderstandings. Where necessary you may also receive individual feedback.

What if my child does not have access to a PC/laptop/tablet?

The use of a phone for the activities above is not appropriate. It may also be that you have more than one child in the house doing remote learning and you may also be working from home yourself and using a lot of your internet bandwidth for meetings that you have for your work. We asked earlier in the year for parents to contact us if this was the case and we are going to be contacting these parents in the next few days to arrange for the loan of devices. These will have to be limited to one per household initially, even if you have two children at school as we are still to receive the allocation of devices that we have asked for.

If you did not respond to this request the first time, or your circumstances have changed, please let us know by sending an email to enquiries@balshaws.org.uk

Key Worker and Vulnerable Children Provision

If you are a keyworker and cannot arrange childcare then you are entitled to Key Worker provision. These students will conduct remote learning in the same way as students at home under the supervision of staff on a rota. We can be very flexible on this as we understand that parents will want to avoid their children increasing their chances of exposure to the virus by having to come to school. Therefore, if you only need provision for days that you are on shift, or certain times, we can accommodate this, but we do ask that you let us know at least 24 hours in advance.

I have already got a list of students who will be accessing Key Worker provision following my last request. If you missed this and both parents/carers are Key Workers and you have not got any other childcare arrangements in place, please email enquiries@balshaws.org.uk to let us know that you will need Key Worker provision. Those students who receive confirmation of a Keyworker/Vulnerable place should arrive at school, in uniform at the time and the gate that they usually use. The times of their school day will be structured in the same way as normal.

We will also contact you directly if we feel that your child would benefit from school-supervised remote learning.

Acts of Worship

We will continue to have live collective acts of worship on a Monday morning to start the week for the whole school at 9.00am.

Examinations

As more information about GCSE and Btec examinations becomes available, we will let you know. I have already contacted Year 11 parents to let them know that vocational exams planned for this week and next week are still taking place.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Mrs Seedall, our Pastoral Care Support Officer will continue to meet students that she was supporting online using Teams. We are also able to add referrals for support to our waiting list. Equally, if you are struggling as a family, we can support you with referrals into services such as Family Support Service if you feel that this could help. We are still here to support you and your child - that never changes.

Free School Meals

We will continue to provide support for those students who are in receipt of Free School Meals. Our Finance Office will contact you if there are any updates or if there is any action that you need to take. If you are struggling in any way with food at home, please contact the school as there are ways that we can help out.

The cold months of January and February never look more bleak than they do now, but we will come through this. The saying that it is darkest before the dawn seems to me to be very true at this time, so hold in there, support one another. Try always to say positive words, even when you don't feel that way - it generates positive responses back and this is the best medicine that we all need at the moment until we get the vaccine.

Kind regards

Mr Steven Haycocks

HEADTEACHER
BALSHAW'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Your Word is a lamp for my feet and a light on my path. (Psalm 119, vs 105)