

Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2020

Dear Parent / Carer,

Following two weeks of closure and additional lockdown measures, I hope this letter finds you and your families safe and well in what are strange and challenging times for us all. It has been a busy fortnight within school as we continue to develop online learning resources, alongside planning the next steps to best support our school and wider community; details of these can be found below.

We would normally be closing today and, although we will continue to be open as a school over the Easter holidays to provide support for our vulnerable students and children of key workers, it is important that staff, students and families take time to rest and re-charge their batteries after a busy term and past fortnight, in particular.

Following the Easter holidays, all of our Google classrooms will be live and it will be through these that staff will continue to set appropriate work. Our amazing staff have worked tirelessly, whilst juggling their own care needs and families, to best resource our Google classroom and our updated *Parent & Student Guide* can be found on our school website to best support you at home, alongside details of individual class codes and how to join.

These are certainly strange times, but hope and opportunities are plentiful – it was great to hear this week that an F1 team had worked with a hospital in London to develop a new form of ventilator for the NHS to use. As a school community, we have contributed to the cause by donating 240 protective goggles to Warrington hospital from our Science Department and our Design & Technology Department have donated a package of protective equipment, including goggles, to Gainsborough House and Whittle Hall care homes. All to ensure that our front line staff can continue to keep themselves and us safe: *Greatest Together!*

Ahead of waiting for the official Government plans, we had already contacted all of our families with children eligible for free school meals and have provided a service which credits each family with shopping vouchers to spend at an affiliated supermarket of their choice and this will continue over the Easter holidays as well.

To help parents and students to stay safe at home, we have shared online resources from CEOP, NSPCC and National Online Safety through our social media feeds. Our Safeguarding Team are filtering through the raft of information sent to us and to ensure you have access to the most useful information, we are creating a new section to our school website which will go live after the Easter holidays. This will include up to date information and safeguarding advice alongside parental resources for mental health and well-being.

To coincide with this information, we will be implementing a welfare call framework where all families will receive regular direct contact from a member of our Pastoral Team. The purpose for this welfare call is to maintain regular positive communication between home and school, whilst finding out how your child is coping with the current situation and any issues, academic or otherwise, that we may be able to support with.

To maintain the link between school and students during this time of physical distancing, we have created lockdown challenges such as 'ready steady cook' and 'tricks with toilet roll'. The entries submitted so far have been superb and we will be sharing details of the winning entries via our social media feeds. If you have not yet made an entry, keep a look out for upcoming challenges, get involved as much as you can and we look forward to seeing as many of you contributing positively to this as possible.



To all our students at home, know that you are missed, really you are! I hope you are finding the work set and information provided by your teachers to be accessible and that you are following some structure to your day. This time, however, is also a great opportunity to do some other things to occupy your time positively at home. What new books are you reading? I have just finished Carlo Ancelotti's Quiet Leadership and started to read Liquid Thinking by Damian Hughes, both great reads! What are you doing to help out at home? Why not help out younger brothers or sisters with their work? What are you doing to help your parents, who are working from home as well, or critically, those key workers having to go out to work every day? Are you learning to cook, use the washing machine or doing the dishes?

Students, you play an important role in making sure a positive family dynamic is maintained during these testing times. I know you all have the ability to rise to the challenge, learn new things and grow as individuals. Your potential is limitless so take the opportunity to develop intellectually, not just academically, physically, socially and emotionally - all key characteristics to help you be successful young people in education and beyond.

Parents, we have received a number of enquiries regarding 'home schooling' and expectations around the amount and completion of work. For Years 7-9 we suggest a couple of hours per day to keep them engaged with school work and for Year 11 we have shared details of bridging work and Google classroom codes to support their transition into Year 12. Our current Year 10 & Yr12 students, however, must ensure that they keep abreast of their exam based studies in preparation for their exams next year.

Whilst we have shared information to ensure the students have tasks to complete and developed our Google classroom, can I share some additional thoughts with you: As a parent myself who is working at home with my two children (Year 8 & Year 4) on the days I'm not in school, I fully appreciate the position you are in and, even as a teacher myself, how challenging it can be. You may have been optimistic and planned a minute-by-minute timetable for your children replicating the school day with hours of focused learning, online activities, silent reading, science experiments, and historical research. You may have set incentives and said that there will be no free time or access to games & technology until all 5 hours work is complete. However, please consider this:

Our children are just as confused and worried as we are right now. They cannot only hear everything that is going on around them, either from the news or through adult conversation at home, but they also pick up on and transfer our tension and anxiety. They have never experienced anything like this before. Although the idea of being off of school for weeks probably sounded great at first, they were probably picturing a fun time like the summer holidays, not the reality of being on lockdown at home with their family and not seeing their friends.

Over the coming weeks, if not already, you may see an increase in some behaviour issues with your child. You may experience some meltdowns, tantrums, and oppositional behaviour. Whether it's anxiety, anger or protest that they can't do things normally - it will happen and is to be expected under these circumstances.

What our children need right now is to feel comforted, loved and to feel like it's all going to be ok. That might mean that you tear up your planned timetable and strike a balance between 'home schooling' and 'home learning'. As a family you may take the opportunity to play in the garden or go on walks, bake cakes or paint pictures. Play board games, do a crossword or watch a movie – thank you Disney Plus 7 day free trial! Do a science experiment together, go online and access the many free virtual field trips of the zoo or museum or start a book and read together as a family.

Please do not worry about your child regressing academically, as every single child in the country is in the same boat and, rest assured, they will all be ok. Please do not feel frustrated with your children because they do not want to do maths or punish them for not following the timetable and do not demand five hours of learning time if they are resisting it. When we return to school and get back to the normality of the classroom, we will meet them where they are and ensure that we correct and fill any gaps in knowledge to move forward positively.

If I can leave you with one final thing, it's this: at the end of all of this, your child's mental health and wellbeing will be more important than their academic position. Looking back in months or years to come, how they *felt* during this uncertain time will stay with them long after the memory of what they *did*.

Please take care of yourselves, stay safe and, more than ever, stay **Great in name, Greatest together**.

Yours sincerely,



Mr Paul Masher  
Deputy Headteacher