



Longbenton High School

29th January 2021

Dear Parents, Carers & Students,

I hope this letter finds you well after what feels like the longest January of all time! As educational news changes so quickly these days, I have not wanted to bombard you with long letters; updates are posted regularly on the news section of our website [here](#), so please check in regularly to see what is happening. However, given the announcement earlier this week from the Prime Minister regarding speculation about full school reopening, I felt it warranted a letter from me to go into further detail on some points.

School reopening announcement

On Wednesday, the Prime Minister announced that it will not be possible to resume face-to-face learning immediately after the February half-term, with the suggestion that it may be safe to commence the reopening of schools and colleges from **Monday 8 March**. This is in response to the national public health data and pressure on NHS capacity. The explanation from the government regards the target of vaccinating everyone in the four most vulnerable groups with their first dose by 15 February: if completed, those groups will have developed immunity from the virus around three weeks later (8 March). It is for this reason that they have said they “hope it will be safe” to commence the reopening of schools from that point.

We have been told by the DfE that we will be given at least two weeks’ notice to prepare for a return to face-to-face education, **which means that by the week beginning 22nd February, we may know more**. It is entirely possible that this return to school may be staggered and for exam year groups first rather than for all year groups, as was originally planned for January.

So for now, we will remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers after February half-term; all other students will continue to receive high quality remote education at home.

Schools will close as usual over February half-term and are not expected to remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers during that week. Schools do not need to provide lunch parcels or vouchers during the February half-term for FSM families; there is wider government support in place to support families and children outside of term-time through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme (this is the payment received at Christmas). Families in receipt of FSM should have received two separate e-codes by now to cover a 4 week period this half-term.



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Remote Learning

We have been thrilled with the student and parent response to our live lessons which are now in their fourth week. Beyond the initial logistical hurdles of laptops and passwords (we issued over 80 brand new Chromebooks this month), students have been adapting to this new way of working incredibly well. We hope it has also made it easier for parents and carers to juggle their own home-working and childcare. One email I received this week sums up what we are trying to deliver: *“Since term began, I have spoken to large numbers of customers that come into my business everyday about their experiences of home-schooling (it's every parent's topic of conversation!). They have children attending High Schools from all over Newcastle and North Tyneside. Longbenton, by far, has the most superior home learning scheme in the area - only on par with the RGS. Your school now has a reputation for it's ongoing live lessons and is the envy of all parents.”*

However, we know that longer-term online learning has some negative elements. One of the things we are concerned about - and which has been raised in student feedback - is mental health and anxiety, the amount of screen time students are engaged in and the pace of lessons / amount of lesson content. It also has the same implications for our own teaching staff, who are sitting in front of a screen for the same amount of time. As a result, from next week, you will notice lessons finishing after 50 minutes in order to give students a 10-minute screen break in between each lesson. This is an opportunity for them to stretch their legs, walk around the garden, get a snack or whatever they need to do to relax and take a few minutes out before logging into their next class.

Parent Feedback Survey

We will be issuing a parent feedback survey shortly so that you can share your views on how you think online learning is going. We are constantly thinking about how we can improve and adapt the learning experience for students at home, without widening the disadvantage gap or putting too much pressure on students, so we genuinely want to hear opinions and suggestions. Please take the time to complete this when the link is sent to you.

Ofsted routine inspections remain suspended until later in 2021 due to the pandemic; however, some remote inspection activity is resuming this month. You can log in at any time to Ofsted Parent View to share your feedback on how you think we are doing as a school; you do not have to wait for us to be inspected. As you will know, we have come a long way from our last report in 2018. If you would like to do so, the link is [here](#).



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Mental Health Week

The week beginning February 1st is Children's Mental Health Week and the theme is 'Express Yourself'. This is a good opportunity to focus on how we can keep ourselves mentally well and how we can support others. Below you will find links to resources that you might find useful:

Place2Be Resources- free resources for all age groups. Resources for parents and carers can be found [here](#).

Mentally Healthy Schools have put together a Children's Mental Health Week toolkit providing a collection of resources for all ages, to help families start the mental health conversation. The toolkit can be found [here](#).

Other resources and links: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/childrens-mental-health-week/zk37bdm>

This resource features case studies, dramas, short films and animations. Scroll to the bottom of the page to find resources aimed at secondary school students.

Exams/Ofqual Consultation

Unfortunately, I am still not in a position to provide any further clarity to Year 11 or Year 13 students regarding how they will be assessed and how final grades will be awarded this year. The Ofqual consultation closes today (there is a summary on our website [here](#)) but until the findings are announced or we have further news from the DfE, it leaves us in limbo. For now, students are completing curriculum content (as they still need this coverage for further study, whatever happens next) and we are planning for a possible second mock exam series if students are back with us by March/April. I will update you as soon as I can.

6th form 'Open Evening'

For Year 11, this is usually the time when they would be considering next steps and attending our NE12 6th Form Open Evening. Our 6th form promo film, prospectus, subject content and option blocks are due to launch on our website on **Monday 8th February** – please save the date. Mr Williams and Mrs Gammack will have been in touch with Year 11 separately regarding interviews and careers content running this month and next; please see the letter on our website in the newsletter section. All ongoing information regarding college applications and apprenticeships is sent out to Year 11 students regularly via their school email, along with School Comms messages to parents and carers.

Cancellation of Y12/13 Parents' Evening



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This was due to take place on Wednesday 10th February at George Stephenson High School. Instead, subject teachers from both schools will be contacting home w/b 1st March to update parents on the progress of their son/daughter and to discuss their engagement with remote learning and performance in recent assessments.

In addition, Year 12 and 13 tutors are currently making welfare calls to their tutees to see how they are getting on, offering support and tracking their progress with remote learning, UCAS offers and applications for apprenticeships and general post- Year 13 plans.

Year 9 Options Process

The Year 9 Options Process will begin next week when all Year 9 students will be participating in an interactive workshop. This will be followed by a presentation outlining the process, and students will receive the option choice booklet through the post before half term. A separate letter will be sent out to parents and carers of Year 9 students.

I apologise for the length of this letter, but hope it has helped you to get up to speed with school issues. In the meantime, please stay in touch. Our pastoral leadership team are in regular contact with students and families, but do not hesitate to contact the school with any questions, concerns or feedback.

Yours faithfully,

Kelly Holbrook

Headteacher