

22nd May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope this letter finds you all safe and well. We continue to remember in our thoughts anyone suffering as a result of COVID-19.

As we approach what would have been the May half-term holiday, it is important that the students who have been working hard do get a break from schoolwork. If they are up to date with their work then it would be good for them to have some time off, although if they would like to do some schoolwork to maintain their routine, then of course that is fine. We do all need some time to switch off and physically and mentally recuperate.

In my letter last week, I told you that senior staff and governors were considering our response to the government's recent announcements about its desire for the gradual re-opening of schools and what this might mean for Longbenton High School. For us, this would mean Year 10 and 12 students, where the ambition is for them to have 'some face to face contact' next half term with their teachers to support continued home learning.

As I write this, we should be breaking for half-term, but the absence of any published guidance for secondary schools from the government, despite this being promised in their publication of 11th May, makes it impossible for us to share any finalised plans with you at this stage. **Therefore, we will not be re-opening to Year 10 and 12 immediately after half term.** Earlier this week I sent out a survey for the parents of Year 10 and 12 pupils about how they would feel about a possible return to some face to face contact with teachers. Most responses indicated that parents would want more detail of what that would mean before they could decide, which is entirely understandable. I thank parents for the comments and feedback that they gave which has helped inform what we have been doing this week.

We are continuing to work closely with other schools locally and with the Local Authority to share ideas about models for a wider reopening of schools. We have done a lot of scenario planning and are considering what would be safe and practical, taking full health and safety advice, drawing up risk assessments and so on. What we do know is that the government is not envisaging an immediate return of whole year groups of Year 10 or Year 12 students to a full timetable of normal lessons. When students can safely access the school and some of their teachers at some point in the summer term, this will be very gradual, initially in small groups and potentially at staggered times during the day.

Along with our whole staff, you, as parents and carers, will of course be consulted on the detail of any plans before any wider access begins, as you will need to be comfortable with what is planned. As well as awaiting further secondary school specific guidance from government, we also understand that 28th May, (i.e. Thursday of half-term), is the date on which the government has stated they will firm up or delay further its current provisional plans for certain year groups returning from 1st June, depending on the conditions and scientific advice that it receives at that time.

I will keep you informed of any further developments. Governors and school leaders are meeting on 2nd June to consider what information is available at that time to dynamically risk assess the current position. Hopefully I will then be able to consult you on a concrete plan for initiating some contact for Year 10 and Year 12 students in the summer term.

Of course, we remain open to the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils and will continue to do so across what would have been the half term break. I thank the many volunteers on my staff who are making this happen.

Finally, please find attached a letter setting out the Mayor and Cabinet's position on the proposed phased reopening of schools, which I have been asked to share with you today. I hope everyone continues to stay safe and well in these challenging times.

Best wishes,

Paul Quinn
Headteacher