

Dear parent / carer,

As always, I hope that this letter finds you and your family well and that you remain safe in these difficult times. I did not write to you last week as things were exceptionally busy with last minute preparations to be ready to welcome Year 10 pupils back for face to face sessions with their teachers this week.

As I write this there are 4 weeks left of the academic year (we break up on Thursday 16th July) and I cannot state with certainty exactly what will happen with respect to school and our students in the next 4 weeks, what will happen over the 6 weeks school summer holidays or how things will look in September! The press are reporting that the Education Secretary is to make some announcements today which may give us an indication of the Government's intentions but a word of caution is appropriate; these intentions / desires have not always manifested themselves as quickly as one might have hoped. An example would be the announcement 2 months ago that the government will provide free laptops and tablets for disadvantaged Year 10s and other vulnerable pupils to help them learn at home during the coronavirus lockdown. No North Tyneside school have yet received any such hardware with the latest message being that we should expect it at "the end of June".

Some personal opinion from me in this next section as I have been angered to see staff in schools being criticised on various fronts for supposedly undermining the government's plan to open schools more widely. Like many other headteachers I have not had a break since February and have worked alongside committed colleagues to keep our schools open, planning relentlessly against a backdrop of ever-changing guidance. This depiction of the profession, in which so many good people have tried to achieve so much in such challenging circumstances, is frustrating and insulting.

I am sending this letter to you on the day of the much-trailed announcement about the government's plans for catch-up provision with the Education Secretary due to lead the evening briefing. It has been pre-empted by press leaks of a **£1 billion 'Covid catch-up plan'**. This sort of investment in young people is of course most welcome but I find myself aligned to the comments of Geoff Barton, leader of ASCL "We welcome this vital investment in helping children to catch-up with lost learning as a result of the coronavirus emergency. It remains frustrating that we haven't had the opportunity to discuss any of this with the government ahead of this announcement and that we once again find ourselves having to guess the detail. We really do need a much more collaborative approach so that the government and profession can together work on developing a really effective, joined-up national plan."

In addition to this grabbing the headlines with this, I hope that schools also get answers to the big questions that will allow us to plan effectively such as:

- When can those disadvantaged pupils in Year 10 receive their promised laptops?
- What plans are there to provide similar resources for other children?
- What form should our planning take for September – for example, will guidelines on social distancing, class sizes and rotas be the same as now? If not, when will we be informed?
- If private tuition is planned for the summer or autumn, who will provide it? What's the quality control? How will it link with the teacher's assessment of the child's need? Will it form part of a wider package available to leaders for children? Will it entail public money being given to private companies? Will it serve the needs of all children, including those with special needs? How will the students be safeguarded?
- And then there are the Year 10 and 12 pupils whom we have started to provide more face-to-face contact for. When precisely will teachers know what they are preparing them for – how the content or assessment arrangements of next summer's exams will be adjusted to reflect these exceptional circumstances?

To me these are utterly reasonable questions that teaching unions have been asking on our behalf without direct response. At Longbenton school leaders, teachers, and other staff, have been working relentlessly, quietly, meticulously behind the scenes to help young people from all backgrounds to reconnect with education in these unprecedented times. I am so proud of my staff and the how they have dealt with the challenges of the past 3 months and their overwhelming desire to do their very best for the children in our school. I take great umbrage at any media portrayal that staff in schools do not want students back and are any sort of barrier to this happening. We need consistent and realistic guidance on how this can be achieved safely and then we will work collectively to make it happen.

Everyone at LHS wants your children back in school, in lessons with their teacher, seeing their friends with their emotional wellbeing supported by our staff who they trust. But we all know that this must be done safely for everyone. I am delighted to be able to report that we have resumed face to face sessions this week with Year 10 students and that these have gone exceptionally well. Students have observed stringent social distancing and staff have really enjoyed seeing them again and working with them. They have met their form tutor and had lessons in English, Maths and Science. I am really proud of how our Year 10 students have approached these sessions; well done to them all. We have Year 12 students in next week and I have no doubts that this will be another very positive experience. As you know, we continue to have an in-school provision for the children of Key Workers and this

continues to grow in size as more Key Workers return to the workplace. We would love to have the capacity to work with more students, but the guidelines are quite explicit about the numbers of pupils we have in school at any time.

Guidance that was published 3 weeks ago which has been a key document in our risk assessments for resuming face to face sessions in school was amended on Monday:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-secondary-schools>

This new guidance “confirms that where possible, schools may invite pupils in other year groups in for a meeting this term”. School leaders and Governors are exploring the logistics of how that could work. I am hoping that I will be able to invite each Year 7, 8 and 9 pupil into school to meet their form tutor to discuss home learning and pastoral wellbeing during lockdown; I feel this would be really beneficial to those young people to do this. There is a meeting of school Governors on Tuesday 23rd June at which this will be discussed, and I will communicate with parents of those children after that meeting.

During this week Centre Assessed Grades have been submitted to exam boards for GCSE and A' level courses and we will be communicating arrangements for results days in due course. I hope that some of the social distancing regulations will have been relaxed by then so that these young people have the chance to see their friends and teachers. They have had to do without their last day in school, celebrating their last exam, their planned Prom etc. so I hope they do get circumstances in which they can celebrate their success.

The police have written to us asking to share some communications and a survey for young people that I have attached to this email. please read through it as there is some very helpful advice and guidance in this. In addition, at the end of this letter is a message to parents about travel on public transport from Nexus for you to be aware of.

As always, stay safe, stay alert and have a good weekend,

Paul Quinn

MESSAGE FROM NEXUS TRAVEL

With more children returning to school this week and the upcoming weeks I just wanted to drop you a line on the changes that have been made to public transport.

We want you, your staff and pupils to feel comfortable and secure when you have to travel by public transport although if at all possible, consider walking, cycling and the car as alternatives to public transport.

That means:

- *We are cleaning and sanitising trains, buses and stations in new ways.*
- *We provide guidance and information throughout your journey to help you maintain social distance.*
- *Our customer service staff will manage stations to stop them becoming too busy.*
- *We meet the Government's covid-secure standard for public transport.*

You can help us to keep you and fellow passengers safe by staying alert, and following a few simple steps:

- *Follow guidance on your journey, such as floor and wall markings, to help maintain distance.*
- *Travel outside the busy peak periods in the morning from 7am to 10am and in the afternoon from 4pm to 6pm, if you can.*
- *Wear a face covering in confined spaces including stations and vehicles – this can be a simple scarf or snood pulled over nose and mouth, or an over-the-counter mask. This will be compulsory from Monday 15 June. [click here](#) to see how to make a face covering*
- *Consider walking, cycling and the car as an alternative to public transport.*

You'll find more information on travel by Metro, bus and Shields Ferry on the website.

Nexus, bus operators and local authorities in North East England are proud to provide covid-secure travel for you when you need it.