

21st May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Whilst teachers and schools seem to be in the news at the moment, it was lovely to receive so many thanks and thoughts for the national "thank a teacher day" whilst it has also been so reassuring to read the range of feedback in recent surveys. Whilst much of the news is focussed on primary schools, the wording for secondary schools does allow a more localised solution i.e. we can decide how we meet the criteria of offering year 10 some face to face support before the scheduled summer break. We are all now waiting on government advice that we have been promised by May 28<sup>th</sup>, which will dictate in what ways we extend our provision. Year 10 are the only year groups specifically mentioned in the initial government announcement and this is linked to them being on an exam course, rather than any talk of "kick starting" the economy.

School remains closed to students, except for those accessing the LSA Childcare provision and will **not** "reopen" on June 1st. When we are able to work safely and sensibly with year 10, then they will be welcomed back to follow personalised, individual timetables (likely to be either the 8<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> June) We all recognise the new challenges this may present as families start to go back to work in greater numbers. During the period of lockdown, over 400 key workers shifts have been able to be fulfilled whilst the childcare provision has been in place.

One of the biggest challenges we face is making sure that we do not sacrifice the brilliant online work we have established in an attempt to cover the teaching of year 10. We have received a few questions about "live" online lessons (some schools offer this through Teams or Zoom) and many of you will have seen an increase in recorded lessons. Whilst a tiny number of schools (less than 5% nationally) have opted for "live" taught lessons, feedback is very mixed. Whilst some feel they would be "better" there is no there is no evidence to support this and there are many other areas to consider (technology failure, childcare issues, safeguarding). In a school where we recognise individual needs, we are increasing our provision but continuing to focus on the best possible learning through Satchel One (formerly SMHW). Some departments are rolling out trials through Microsoft Teams and we are monitoring this closely. Teachers have been brilliant in preparing work and being willing to record segments of lessons, much of which will increase as the term moves on.

We had planned to increase our "live" provision this week, but clearly we are now working to meet the new government requirements. Our original plan of moving to phase 3 after the half term still stands, but I am sure many of you will have noted more staff finding time away from their own caring needs to brave the camera.

There has also been a request to facilitate social interaction through school for the students. Again, whilst we recognise the social issues currently being felt, this is not something we can offer due to the time it takes from delivering our core learning. If your child is struggling with the current situation, please speak to their form tutor or College Leader and we will see if we can help, or signpost to support.

#### **Half Term**

The school calendar is still marked as being a school holiday for staff and students between Monday 25<sup>th</sup> May to Friday 29<sup>th</sup> May. We are not expecting staff to set work over this period. However, we do know that some issues with SMHW/Satchel One may mean some submission dates have slipped into this period. These will be errors and can be ignored!

The school will be open to those registered for Key Worker Childcare provision, as it has since the start of the lockdown period.

### **Thoughts about Lost Learning Time**

I realise that I cannot ease fears over employment, income or illness but I can talk from an education point of view. The Coronavirus pandemic is a worldwide problem, impacting the education experience of every single child this year. It is true that some students that have been unable to engage in learning will have to work hard on their return but this has always been the case at school. Those that have not engaged will be supported, whilst those that have thrived will be supported to fly even higher. Children have many years of formal schooling and we should be focusing more on the wider impact (mental health, friendship's, relationships, physical health) of this situation, as we are hugely confident in our ability to get students back on track quickly when some form of normality returns.

I agree with those that talk about the importance of education. It is a wonderful thing that brings opportunity to everyone. However, some of the items written at the moment are making the situation more stressful for parents who are being told that their child is "falling behind" and that "schools must open." We want to open when it is safe to do so and we are already putting plans in place for year 10. However, I want to reassure you that academically and pastorally, your children will be fine, whenever we can bring them back.

Whilst I will not be able to settle the nerves of everyone, please remember that we have a lot of experience in:

- We have extensive success and experience in delivering GCSEs in reduced time (sometimes, a course needs to change, a long teacher absence or specification are withdrawn giving us only a small fraction of the time to deliver two years of GCSE content. We have managed this successfully many, many times).
- Occasionally, students join our school after years out of education and still succeed (sometimes this is for health reasons, sometimes it is for relocation reasons, but children have missed large parts of their schooling only for us to find ways to support, nurture and get them to succeed at the end. On the other side of this, we have had students who have attended 100% for five years but underachieved due to attitude and work habits!)
- Often, these situations have required clever use of our timetable, some intervention, some online support, some mentoring, close work with parents and expertise from the teachers. We will be ready for this on a much larger scale when we get back to normal.
- The fact that the current system of GCSE assessment is based around how students perform compared to others in the country, gives us assurance that your child, being at a good, successful school, has a far greater likelihood of doing well.
- Many students are producing work at a very high standard and developed brilliant working habits.
- No student at LSA will miss out on a college place or career route because of this period of school closure.
- Nothing is certain in either schools or the future, but we must look at what we know and realise that a great attitude when we return will allow for incredible strides to be made.

These are just a few reasons, which I hope give you a little confidence that no matter how much learning time we lose, we will work together to catch it up when school life returns to something resembling normality. In short, the Coronavirus is a health, economic and social challenge impacting us all. However, for LSA, it is not the catastrophe to education many will be fearing because of our brilliant children, committed teachers and supportive families.

I hope we are all keeping safe and well, managing to follow the government guidance of staying alert.

I look forward to seeing you all again soon.



Ray Baker  
Headteacher