



8 January 2021

Dear parents, carers and guardians,

Thank you for the incredibly encouraging feedback on this week's live lessons and all that you have provided since the last lockdown to help us to prepare for this one. We now have a very 'tight process' of registering students, dropping into lessons to encourage them; phoning parents if there is a hint of disengagement and rapidly following up absenteeism within minutes of the remote register being taken. This has meant we have had staggeringly high attendance figures which in turn has ensured that students have been purposefully occupied – at home and safe; their mood lifted; they have been motivated towards learning goals; their sense of self-esteem as learners has flourished further and built that all important sense of team-spirit with virtually full classes throughout.

For those of you with students in Years 11 and Year 13 it looks as if we are going to have to wait for a further three weeks before we know what the government plans are for assessments. The one thing that we do know is that by showing the work ethic and commitment to their studies that students have this week, they will be significantly better prepared –whatever the decision on the final form of assessment.

To use the jargon – the 'operational effectiveness' in school has also meant we now have the ability to put more energy into getting feedback from staff, working with students whose work quality needs more encouragement and providing practical support across the age range to ensure all students of all abilities are making even better progress.

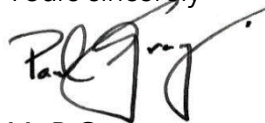
However, I have a concern. I do not want to have to dismantle live lessons and ask staff to come into school to teach or supervise. Last night, the government sent out more guidance on the provision that schools are expected to make for vulnerable students and those who have a parent who is a critical worker. We fully support the principles that lie behind this. The school had already proactively reached out to students whose circumstances have required them to attend school. We also contacted parents we knew to be key (critical) workers to invite their children back into school to undertake the same live lessons as they would at home.

Many parents have legitimately contacted us to say us that they believe they meet the criteria and it is impossible for their children to work from home without supervision. Others however, in significant numbers have made requests or informed us of their 'entitlement' and appear not to have asked themselves the following two questions: "Is this something I would like?" or "Is it an absolute need for which there is no alternative?" Some requests have been for children of an age capable of legally undertaking child-care, let alone self-supervising for relatively safe, short periods.

Already we are close to a tipping point. Teachers cannot be in two places at the same time – both delivering live lessons via a computer screen and teaching or supervising a class in school. Can I stress, school is not closed - it is partially open. Running both is taking our capacity to its limits. I must also inform you that this spike in demand for additional places coincides with a spike in the number of support staff and teachers with either a positive Covid result or self-isolating. This reached a peak today.

Therefore, my plea is that requests for additional places on site are only made where absolutely essential. The government's latest guidance implies all schools have the capacity to meet the needs of everyone with a perceived entitlement and simultaneously deliver live lessons. In our context, soon this will not be possible. Please consider the greater good.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Gray', with a long, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

Mr P Gray ·
Headteacher