



SEATON VALLEY FEDERATION OF SCHOOLS

Elsdon Avenue, Seaton Delaval, Northumberland NE25 0BP

Tel: 0191 2371505 Fax: 0191 2376891

Email: reception@svf.org.uk

www.svf.org.uk

Chair of Governors: Susan Dungworth

Executive Headteacher: John Barnes

15 January 2021

Dear all

I hope this letter finds you as well as can be expected at this time? I can't believe that we are now two weeks into this lockdown and Christmas Day was 3 weeks ago! Once again this week all members of the federation community have continued in their efforts to make sure that our young people are getting the best education and support that they can in these difficult times.

I think all of us would agree that whilst we are not perfect (I doubt anyone is) we are all trying our very best.

I want to take this opportunity to update you on a number of things. These updates are as the current situation stands they could change if the government has a change of plan.

Mass Testing

As a federation we are putting in place our plans for the mass testing. As with anything like this there are many issues to be aware of and it's a complicated process and we want to get it right. What will be happening soon is that for those pupils in year 7 upwards who are in school we will be asking their parents for consent to do the testing. We then set the testing up and once we are happy with it begin the process. Further details will be shared in a separate letter. You may have seen that mass testing is due to begin in primary years soon. As it stands we have had no real detail on that. So I don't see it starting just yet. What is clear to us is that this is a system that we may need volunteer support with. If you feel that you may be able to help with this when we ask for help please do let us know if you are able to support us. Thank you to those who have already volunteered.

Year 11 and 13 Exams

This week the Secretary of State shared with everyone what his plans were with regard to year 11 and 13 exams. There will now be a period of time where a plan is put together by Ofqual and then that will be consulted on. So sadly there are still very few details. However, what is clear is that the Secretary of State does feel a combination of assessments and teacher based grades as the way to go on this. If this becomes the plan then it is vital that the pupils in year 11 and 13 are doing work at the standard that they want a grade for. The teachers will not be able to award grades if they have no evidence of work done at that standard. Therefore, if you are a parent or guardian of a young person in year 11 or 13 I ask that you make sure that they do the work set otherwise there will be nothing to base a grade on.

With regard to BTECs and Cam Techs the government has not yet made any announcement about these exams.

ICT Devices and Equipment

I am very aware that some families are having major issues due to the fact that they do not have any or enough ICT equipment at home. As a federation we have accessed all we can from the government and we have exhausted our own supplies of "kit" as well. We are doing all we can to get more devices but it's proving difficult. This week it was promised that a further 300,000 devices would be provided nationally. I wait to see if any arrive in our schools. I do not normally make requests of our families as I know that you have a lot going on but if you work in a company that has some ICT devices they could donate to us then please let me know. Anything we can do as a community to support each other is so important at the moment. I promise you we will keep looking to source as many devices as we can and if you are struggling at home please do let us know.

Free School Meals

It seems that the saga of free school meals just does not want to end! However, what we do know is that from Monday the federation will be making use of the national free school meals voucher system and Mr Watson will be in touch with parents who will be receiving these vouchers to let them know how it will be working. If you haven't yet responded to the message sent out on Wednesday to confirm your email address then please do so as soon as possible. With regards to the vouchers for the February half term, as things currently stand these will be issued via the local authority Huggs scheme (as at Christmas) but this may change, and we will keep you updated as we hear more. If you feel that you may qualify for free school meals due to a change in your circumstances please let us know and we will provide you with the necessary information on how to apply for them.

Period Poverty

As a Federation we have been in the vanguard of supporting those young people who may need assistance when it comes to resources with regard to periods. Whilst we are on lockdown we are aware that some pupils may still need this support. If you do require assistance please contact one of these staff members in confidence who will see how they can help you. At SSMS Mrs Staines, at WMS Mrs Telfer and at ACHS Mrs Small.

Online Learning

There seems to have been a lot in the news and on social media about online learning and what should or should not be happening. Next week we will write to you with a detailed letter about what we are doing with regard to online learning. What I will say is that I feel that as a Federation we have been very good in both lockdowns in getting work up online via google classroom and then responding to pupils and parent questions. I also feel that the quality of work being provided in this lockdown is even better than that provided in the first lockdown.

However, I am aware that the biggest area of discussion is around live streamed lessons and the number of these. As a federation we have always said that we would prefer the work that is set is of a high quality and a mixture of styles rather than just being one style. Therefore there will be a mixture of styles provided by staff. These will be live stream lessons, pre-recorded materials by federation staff, recorded materials by national organisations and other forms of work all provided via google classroom.

Due to this I must stress that not every lesson will be live streamed. The three main reasons for this are firstly not every pupil can always access the lessons at the time they are on. This is especially true if there is only one device in a household. Secondly, research has shown that it is not good for anyone to be watching online lessons 5 hours a day with regard to their physical health. Finally research released by Ofsted this week has shown that the best online learning is a combination of different styles of delivery and learning which is what the federation schools provide. I am sorry if this is not what you wanted to hear and you feel that all lessons should be live streamed. The simple point is that they will not be. As a staff body we are looking to increase the number of live lessons we deliver as the lockdown goes on.

Return to School

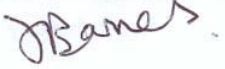
Some people have been asking when we will be returning to school. The simple fact is that I simply have no idea. The Secretary of State has laid out 4 factors that have to be reached before the government thinks about lifting the lockdown but it seems that we are still some way away from meeting those. Please be assured that when the decision is made we will ensure that our young people return as quickly and as safely as possible.

As this week draws to a close I think it is safe to say that most of us are finding this lockdown a lot harder than the first one. However we are as a community doing well and ensuring that we look after each other. The news seems never endingly depressing at the moment in relation to case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths, and I know many of us will be affected by this. At the schools we will do all we can to support your children and you through this and if you have any concerns please do contact us and we will see how we can help.

What is clear is that we must all take care and stay safe until the vaccination has been rolled out and we are able to return to our normal lives.

I hope you have a good weekend and wish you all the very best.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Barnes". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long tail on the final letter.

John Barnes
Executive Headteacher