



5th January 2021

Dear Parents,

COVID-19 Parent Update

As you will be aware, the Prime Minister has announced a new national lockdown because of rising infection rates of Covid-19 and the need to prevent the further spread of the virus.

As part of this, all primary schools, secondary schools and colleges in England, including Tarleton Academy are now closed to the majority of students, except for children of key workers, vulnerable or high needs SEND students, until at least the end of half term in February,.

We have included again the details for those students coming into school from tomorrow and ask that you contact us by email at enquiries@tarletonacademy.org if you believe your child should be in school.

For those students who will now be attending school, there is no longer a requirement that you wear your full school uniform.

The Prime Minister also announced that “not all exams” would go ahead as normal this year and that there would be alternative arrangements. He said the Government would set out further details on this at a later date, and when that information is announced, we will update parents of students due to take exams this year. In the meantime, a separate letter has been sent to students in Year 11 explaining the current situation and the importance of staying focused despite the obvious disappointment. Every piece of work completed will still make a difference.

Remote Learning Support

For those students in Year 7 to Year 11 working at home, staff will continue to offer high-quality remote learning support until at least the end of the current half-term (Friday 12th February).

We know that this places pressure on students and their families at a difficult time but your support in helping your child engage with our remote learning support is so important and we are very grateful for it.

As we outlined yesterday, students will be provided with home learning via Class Charts in line with their usual timetable. We have had some parents who have queried why the Trust, across its family of schools, are not asking teachers to deliver ‘live lessons’ at their timetabled time to students.

In addition to this letter we are also sending you the latest publication on distance learning from the Education Endowment Foundation, which is the research body set up by the Department for Education to inform best practice in schools, which we believe supports our approach.

Outstanding education at the heart of the community

Following an on-going review since last March on what some schools are offering, we still believe very strongly that live lessons do not provide the remote learning panacea that a small minority of parents believe. Below is the most recent guidance from the Department of Education (DfE) for the latest national lockdown which sets out the following expectations for remote learning. Underneath this we have outlined some of the considerations in support of our position.

Schools and teachers are expected to:

- Set assignments so that students have meaningful and ambitious work each day in a number of different subjects
- Ensure students have 4 hours work a day, with more for students working towards formal qualifications this year, although this situation is now undergoing review.
- Provide frequent, clear explanations of new content, delivered by a teacher or through high-quality curriculum resources or videos
- Have systems for checking, at least weekly, whether students are engaging with their work, and inform parents immediately where engagement is a concern
- Gauge how well students are progressing through the curriculum using questions and other suitable tasks
- Provide feedback, at least weekly, using “digitally facilitated or whole-class feedback where appropriate”.
- Enable teachers to adjust the pace or difficulty of what is being taught in response to questions or assessments, including, where necessary, revising material or simplifying explanations to ensure students’ understanding.

Our remote learning commitment to all students has three core strands:

1. *Interesting, challenging and accessible content*
2. *Regular, live, online, face to face meetings with our students to gauge progress, engagement and wellbeing*
3. *Continued development of resources and the sharing of best practice*

Live lessons

Our belief is that teaching staff, asked to deliver live lessons at timetabled periods would not be able to adequately meet these three important commitments for some of the following reasons:

- We know from leaders in other schools, that effective and engaging live lessons are more likely to be delivered more technically proficient staff and teachers who are confident in this type of delivery. The outcome of this is potentially an inconsistent quality of experience for students. This is not only a training issue for which we don’t have time to address, but also risks us not meeting strand 1 in full.
- Key worker provision is limited in schools in order to keep the rates of virus transmission in schools down. As such, many of our staff now have their own children at home, which significantly limits their ability to be ‘online’ in a live delivery context through the day. As a Trust that strongly invests in our families, including those of our staff, we are comfortable

that all of our staff can contribute to a quality remote learning experience without putting any family members at risk unnecessarily.

- A number of our staff are currently experiencing the effects of having or having had Covid and this means they are not all available to deliver live lessons. This would mean some students would have a 'fragmented' experience in line with their peers.
- All staff that are able to come into school, have a regular duty day on rota to ensure that those key worker and vulnerable students in school are supervised and provided with the support they need to access the remote learning resources in school. Any live lessons from those staff would not be able to be delivered on those given days in line with the timetable.
- Our second core strand places huge importance during these difficult weeks ahead on the requirement to now meet online face-to-face with every student individually on a regular basis. Our intention is for this to be at least weekly, but we hope to have the capacity to this more regularly than this, to enable more in-depth discussions with students who may be struggling with a range of issues linked to either accessing the remote learning or wider well-being issues. Live lessons from teaching staff would reduce our ability to provide this crucial and bespoke interaction with students. This provision is an addition to the previous lockdown and will hopefully alleviate some of the feelings of isolation our students have reported to us.
- Given that all our students do not have access to online technology, high speed data and quality devices, and as a passionately inclusive Trust, we also know that live lessons will not be equitable to all our students. The only students who can access 'live lessons' are those with individual devices and enough data to support that level of live streaming. Of its very nature, this will lead to unequal provision and anything we do needs to give all our students equality of access, which live lessons simply do not.
- The trust has built its reputation on a staff professional development strategy that values the importance of collaboration. The benefits of staff doing this across four secondary schools supports our third strand and allows the development and use of resources from the best practitioners both within our own Trust and beyond. Live lessons isolate staff and reduce the ability for them to work collaboratively during their working day.
- We have been mindful of ways we can continually improve the feeling of interaction and personalisation in our remote learning. Our teachers are encouraged across their subject communities to share ideas, record explanations, annotate PowerPoints, add recorded commentary to filmed demonstrations and source wider recorded online content to name but a few options, in order to develop our remote learning offer. This preparation would be done less effectively, if staff were expected to deliver a live timetable to students.
- Finally, and as previously mentioned, teachers will be sharing subject resources across the trust and supplementing their own planning with highly regarded remote resources provided by both Oak National Academy and Greenshaw Learning. These online, pre-recorded lessons include many instances of interactive teaching and have significantly improved since the first lockdown. Our staff are utilising these much more widely and they are a good substitute for 'the real thing'.

I know that despite outlining the rationale that we think is best for our students, there will be some parents that will remain unconvinced and no amount of communication from us will change your

position. To those parents, we simply ask that you trust us as professionals to do what we think is right for your child and accept a commitment from us that we won't let them down.

We will never knowingly short change our students, we will always do our best to provide our best and we stand by the provision we have in place.

Please remember this is home learning, NOT home schooling.

- No one expects parents to act as teachers, or to provide the activities and feedback that a school would.
- Where possible help your son/daughter as you would with their usual homework.
- Remember it's their work, not yours.
- Create conditions for them to get on with their work independently where possible.
- Make sure they have structure.
- Encourage them to work in bursts, with breaks, physical activity and enjoyable distractions in between.
- Students are not expected to do the lessons in the order they appear on their timetable but should do all their scheduled lessons on that day.
- In school, most lessons are taken up with question and answer interactions and discussions with their teachers and other students and this simply cannot be replicated at home.

Structuring the day

Details will follow in due course, but we will have up and running by Monday 11th January a daily morning assembly delivered on-line that we will expect all students to log onto and experience live. The purpose of this is to provide a daily focus for students to start the day in the right way and encourage all our students to be up and ready for learning just as they would be if in school.

Children/young people will feel more comfortable and learn better with a predictable routine to the day. Generally, you should try to make sure that they:

- get up and go to bed at the same time each day
- have regular meal times
- have regular breaks – the school day is usually broken up with movement between lesson, break and lunch times
- make time to be active - physical activity usually happens naturally in school but should be planned for at home – even if it is just running on the spot

The importance of good sleeping habits and a strong routine

We know from previous periods of remote learning the ups and downs students and their families will have to cope with. A common concern for students last time round was the ability of managing a routine and avoiding sleep patterns that leave them feeling tired all the time.

Here are also some tips and recommendations supported by the NHS on how to get a **minimum of 8 to 9 hours' good sleep which is recommended children of secondary school age:**

Limit screens in the bedroom

- If possible, don't have a mobile, tablet, TV or computer in the bedroom at night, as the light from the screen interferes with sleep.
- Having screens in the bedroom also increases the likelihood of staying up late interacting with friends on social media.
- Encourage at least 30 minutes of screen-free time before going to sleep.

Exercise for better sleep

- Regular exercise helps with sleep, as well as improving general health.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes' exercise every day, including aerobic activities such as fast walking and running.
- Exercising out in daylight will help to encourage healthy sleep patterns too.

Cut out the caffeine

- Drink less caffeine – found in drinks such as cola, tea and coffee – particularly in the 4 hours before bed.
- Too much caffeine can make falling asleep more difficult and reduce the amount of deep sleep.

Don't binge before bedtime

- Eating too much, or too little, close to bedtime can lead to an overfull or empty stomach. This can be a cause of discomfort during the night and may prevent sleep.

Have a good routine

- Encourage a regular bedtime routine. Doing the same things in the same order an hour or so before bed can help with drifting off to sleep.
- Create a sleep-friendly bedroom.
- Ensure a good sleeping environment – ideally a room that is dark, cool, quiet and comfortable.

Talk through any problems

- Talk to your son/daughter about anything they're worried about. This will help them to put their problems into perspective and sleep better.
- You could also encourage them to jot down their worries or make a to-do list before they go to bed. This should mean they're less likely to lie awake worrying during the night.

Avoid long weekend lie-ins

- Encourage your son/daughter to not sleep in for hours at weekends. Late nights and long lie-ins can disrupt your body clock and leave you with weekend "jet lag" on Monday morning.

A reminder on details for those students in school for the remainder of this half term

With our **most vulnerable and high needs SEND** students in school, parents will already have been contacted by staff and discussed detail regarding the supervised well-being and learning support that will be provided.

It is important to re-iterate that given the more transmissible nature of the new-variant virus, the school will be following stringent Public Health England (PHE) health and safety guidance which will include strict adherence to the wearing of face masks and a maximum of **ten** students in any given classroom to ensure staff and students are compliant with 2-metre social distancing in classrooms, which hasn't been possible previously.

It is for this reason, to keep numbers down and reduce the chances of virus transmission that students will only be invited into school where it is essential, so that we keep the number of students in school at a safe and manageable level. Having said that, if you have not been contacted by staff, but feel that your child should be in school, please email enquiries@tarletonacademy.org and a member of staff will contact you.

The school will also be supervising the remote learning of **critical worker children** across this period. Again, to keep the numbers in school at a safe level, we are offering this primarily to those families where adults in the home are key workers who are at work during the school day and their children are in either Year 7 or Year 8. We will be speaking to parents to confirm their critical worker status for students in these two year groups. If you haven't already, or you haven't already been contacted, please email enquiries@tarletonacademy.org .

For children of critical worker parents in other year groups where you feel there may be a safeguarding concern if working at home unattended, please also email enquiries@tarletonacademy.org with details, include a contact number and a member of staff will contact you directly to discuss.

Lunch will be provided for those students in school and we will be clarifying numbers with Lancashire County Council so that where needed, dedicated transport to and from school is available.

The timings of the school day will remain unchanged with students expected at 8.45am prepared for learning with the correct equipment including a set of headphones and a fully charged Chromebook. Students will **NOT** need to wear their school uniform.

Communication Matters

Finally, if your contact details have changed recently or you know a parent who is not receiving these regular updates, please could you email the new details to enquiries@tarletonacademy.org or direct this e-mail address accordingly.

Many thanks for your ongoing understanding and support and please stay safe.

Yours faithfully,

M Cunniffe

Head of School
Tarleton Academy