



Friday 29th January 2021

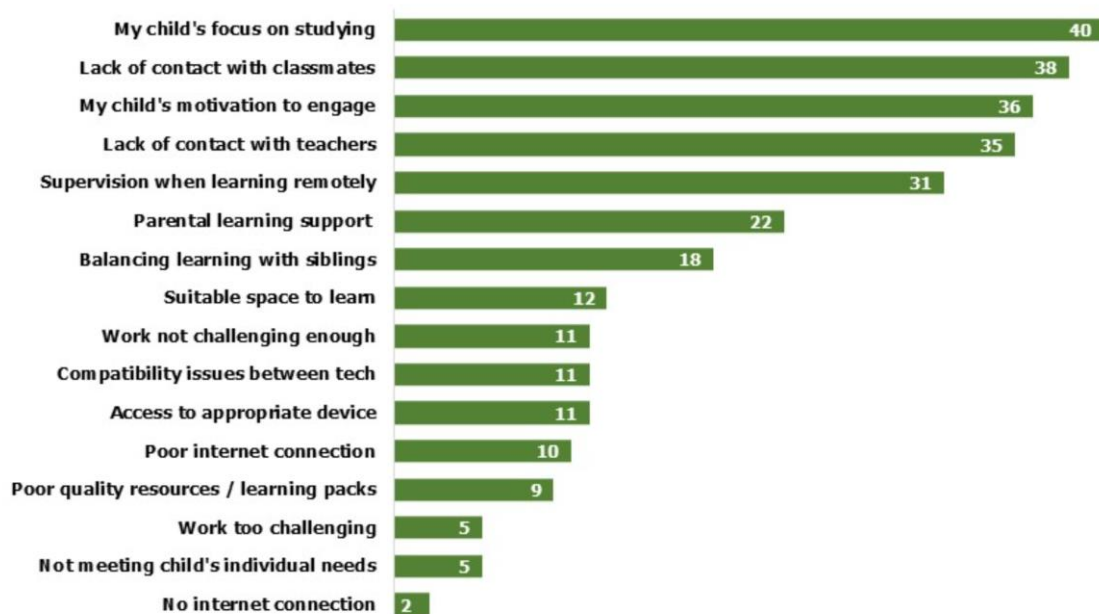
Dear Parents,

Parent Update Letter

Last week we sent all parents a detailed overview of how our family of schools across the Endeavour Learning Trust were supporting your sons and daughters with their remote learning. In that letter we made reference to the importance of balancing school work with other interests and to build in breaks from the screen and to get active whenever possible.

Through our interactions with our families and students, we are aware that this is a very tough time and we are very keen to support our parents and students in managing this. At the request of some parents, we have pulled together some advice and guidance on how best to manage the anxiety and stress that some of our students are experiencing as they struggle to cope with the current restrictions. We are sure that much of this advice will already be in place and encouraged by parents but we hope that this information reinforces the messages that you are giving your sons/ daughters. For example, from time to time, it is okay and we should all be encouraged to break and step away from the computer screen.

In a recent YouGov questionnaire, parents highlighted a range of remote learning concerns that they have. You can see from the percentages below, keeping our children and young people motivated and engaged is a genuine struggle, of which we are very aware:



Outstanding education at the heart of the community

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Endeavour Learning Trust

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We have previously discussed the importance of a positive start to the day and joining the morning assemblies and weekly tutor sessions which we are in the process of finalising. This helps structure the day and helps students follow their timetabled lessons. A daily routine also helps students with their self-organisation and the submission of work. Our teachers are also encouraging students to use Google Chat to communicate with them and access any support they might need.

In addition to this, every single student in all our schools has been assigned a personal mentor. The personal mentor will undertake at least one virtual meeting per week to offer one to one advice and support, both from an academic perspective and a pastoral one. It would be great for you to talk to your son/daughter about the meetings, what was discussed and how they intend to act on the advice given and we know this is already happening in many cases.

It hopefully goes without saying, that if anything came up in these discussions that we felt you should be aware of, we would contact you without hesitation.

What other help is out there to support you?

We all know that manageable levels of stress, every now and again, are normal and a part of everyday life. However, during the pandemic, what we might have considered normal no longer applies and for many families and young people, stress levels have increased dramatically.

What follows is some general advice for parents to reinforce, suggest or discuss with their child in order to help everyone manage this situation. This includes reference to positive activities and links to what may be useful resources and information. We know that many parents are juggling work and managing remote learning in the home but hopefully some of these tips will help.

Planning the day/ week

Designing a weekly schedule really helps. As well as factoring in school-based learning, adding other activities such as sports, cooking, watching classic films they may be unaware of and/or nature walks can really help. Lots of museums and galleries now do virtual tours as well.

Building in genuine breaks from the screen, including lunch, is essential. Maintaining a daily routine, makes them feel safe and secure, and gets them into school mode. Any routine should also include regular times for going to bed and waking up and should take into account our daily assemblies and live tutor sessions.

Break up the day

Parents have told us that some of our students are struggling with their workload. A typical day at school has assemblies, break times, moving around school, teacher talk, group activities and isn't all solid learning at a screen. These points give students a break between their learning and a chance to switch off which some may not be allowing themselves whilst working remotely. So, make sure your son/daughter gets up between lessons, moves around, has a drink and gets outside which may help them to feel less overwhelmed. This may help your son/daughter focus better and we know that exercise can help alleviate worries and offers time to reflect. It also releases endorphins to help boost mood.

Reading

If they are struggling to get everything done, focus on reading first and foremost. It is central to the curriculum, so if you build fluency and a love of reading, it unlocks doors to everything else. As a reminder, we do have suggested subject [reading and watching](#) lists on our school website and we are also more than happy to provide reading books so please feel free to contact us at the school.

Step away occasionally

This can be difficult if it's a busy work day or there is a frustrating piece of school work, patience and flexibility will pay dividends. It is important to prioritise your son's/daughter's wellbeing, so if they become upset, move on to another task or allow them space to step away. Please don't forget that we have set up Google Chat rooms for teachers and other students to provide support but, if they are struggling, avoid pressuring yourself or your son/daughter. This is a stressful time for all of us and it is more important to have peace of mind than getting anxious over not completing a task. Everyone, including your sons and daughters, will need some unstructured time.

When we note a task as not completed, this is the start of a conversation not a judgement. If there is too much work, we can feed that back to our teachers so that they become more aware of what it is like at the student end and tailor the work appropriately.

Rewards

Motivation is key during this period of remote learning, a period that, as you may already know, is going to extend into March. Praise when your son/daughter completes activities, and small rewards to look forward to at the end of the day, are a way of reassuring them – and yourself – that all that matters is trying their best. We know that not all our students are self-motivated, so it doesn't hurt to reward hard work. We are working with our staff in school to give rewards whenever we can, and also through our feedback that acknowledges their efforts and their achievements.

Keep Talking

Teachers and support staff are trained to look for signs of stress and anxiety and will always give students space to share their fears. It's natural for young people to worry. At home, let them know they can always come to you for answers or to talk about what scares them. For younger students, it can help to have 'worry time', a set part of the day to get all the worries out. Sometimes our students find it helpful to write worries down and throw them away. Our students might be worrying about something which seems small to us as adults but which is very real to them and, as a school, we are always happy to support even if the worries may seem relatively minor or 'silly' to you.

Don't worry about falling behind

Across the country and in the media, we are sure you are hearing many comments related to students 'falling behind'. We appreciate all students are behind where they would have been in terms of curriculum content, subject knowledge, progress towards GCSE exams and so on. However, it is

important to remember that all students, up and down the country are behind where we would 'usually' be, so it is reasonable to assume many are roughly at the same stages. Please be reassured that even if your son/daughter does fall behind their peers, we will recognise that when we return and we will work closely with them to help them catch up. All schools will endeavour to get their students back to where they need to be. As a nation, we are in this together.

Parental Support

Some useful organisations with contact numbers and links to provide any additional support that you might need can be found on our website [HERE](#) (a PDF document is also attached with this letter)

Finally, it is important to let our students know that it's normal to feel stressed at times, everyone does. Recognising these feelings and reminding everyone that stressful times pass and life gets back to normal can help young people build perspective and then resilience. Change can create stress and good mental health is the ability to recognise this, respond and adapt. We hope that some of the strategies and signposts for support will help you, your family or your friends.

We know that some students need to be in school due to their learning needs or where parents are not available at home due to critical worker roles. We know that being in school can really help with mental health, but we also know that it is essential that we stay at home where we can be to reduce transmission of the virus. That said, if you are genuinely concerned, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Please remember that no one is alone in all of this and we are all part of a school community, where everyone is genuinely doing their best. We really hope that some of you have found this helpful. We know that many of you will be very aware of many of the points we have raised. It is never our intention to patronise you or to tell you how to parent. We just wanted to respond to the general questions that have been coming in and, if this helps just one family or just one of our students, then we think it has been worthwhile. We hope you receive this in the spirit with which it is intended.

Take care and very best wishes from all of us at Tarleton Academy.

Yours sincerely,

M Cunniffe

Head of School
Tarleton Academy