

2 November 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

Welcome back! I hope you have had a wonderful break, despite the constant rain over the last two weeks. This is always a busy half term as we begin the lead into Christmas. We are planning on some level of 'normality' with Christmas activities this year but will still be taking measures to reduce numbers. Further details will follow in due course. I have included some updates for parents/carers below.

### **Half term vouchers**

We were notified by the council on the day we finished that they have managed to secure funding to provide a £15 voucher for each week of the holidays for children who are entitled to means tested free school meals. The costs of doing this for Unity Academy are substantial and as such the company who issues the vouchers will not send them until monies have cleared in the bank. The timing of the contact from the council meant we could not get the payment to clear before half term. Colleagues have worked on this over half term and a £30 voucher will be issued (for each eligible child) to all parents of children eligible for means tested free school meals this week.

### **School lunches**

Having been served well by Chartwells for school meals for the last 4 years our contract with them came to an end on the 31st October. The school lunch service at Unity will now be provided by Blackpool Catering Service (Blackpool Council) from 1st November. It is likely that there will be some teething issues in the first couple of weeks but I am confident that high quality meals will be provided to children.

### **Staffing update**

A number of parents have contacted us regarding the higher than usual amount of cover/supply teachers in the last half term. Unfortunately, despite our best wishes, the situation with regard to COVID in school is far from normal and we are still experiencing high levels of staff absence linked to this. Each of these absences covers a minimum of 10 days and as such it is unlikely that cover is 'one off'. Sadly, some colleagues have also been really quite unwell with the illness. We have worked incredibly hard to secure some very experienced supply staff who will remain in school with us for the foreseeable period which should at least allow more consistency. Parents/Carers should be aware that this is an issue affecting multiple schools and we are raising the issue with relevant Government departments.

## **Remembrance**

As normal, Unity Academy will pause for 2 minutes at 11AM on the 11th November as part of our remembrance observations. A small wreath laying ceremony will take place by the plaque at the front of school at this time. Student representatives will also lay a wreath at the cenotaph in Blackpool on Sunday 14th November. The academy harmony group will also perform at this event.

## **Christmas activities**

Whilst I appreciate that the last thing on the minds of most of us at the moment is mince pies and carols, our Christmas events and activities do start in a little over 4 school weeks. We will send detailed information about these events well in advance but would ask for your support as we try and carefully manage the numbers of those who can attend these events.

## **COVID**

I have been asked to remind parents/carers that children in Y7 and above are requested to take lateral flow tests twice a week on an ongoing basis. These kits are provided to students if they need them.

As a parent, I know how frustrating the call from school can be when a child is showing a symptom of COVID-19, particularly with coughs and colds being widespread at the moment. We do still need to ask parents to get a test when children have symptoms as this is still a Government requirement. Tests can be arranged quickly and students are often able to return to school with a negative test result within 24 hours.

## **Term Dates**

Whilst we have just returned to school, I wanted to remind parents that we break for Christmas at 1.00 PM on Tuesday, 21st December 2021 and reopen on Wednesday, 5th January 2022. School is closed to children for staff training on Friday 11th February 2022.

I look forward to the term ahead and potentially the opportunity to meet with some of you face to face at one of the events this term.

Yours sincerely,



Mr S Cooke  
Headteacher