

Dear Parent/Carer

After the frenetic start to the term we seem to be settling into a routine and rhythm this week that is seeing attendance at a higher level than we would normally have in the cold, dark days of January, and good levels of engagement from the students. We are only two weeks into a way of working that has been forced upon us, and I am proud of what the staff are doing, particularly when we receive the positive feedback from students and parents. This is always shared with staff and, as I have said previously, is always well-received and helps to keep morale high.

Parental Feedback

Thank you to those who took the time to respond last week to our brief survey. Your responses recognise that some of the younger students need support from teachers in managing the chat/camera and microphone functions in lessons and you have asked us to be mindful that post-online lesson some of students need some time to 'finish off' tasks or complete homework. You point out that after a day of lessons in front of a screen more computer work is unwelcome and we need to allow time for students to complete work at their own pace within the school day. You have said that whilst recognising that we are all doing our best, students are missing the chance to 'do the fun extra-curricular activities' they have enjoyed previously in school. This has been shared with staff, who are keen to continue to build upon their existing practice and will be doing so over the coming weeks.

Today students will be asked to give us their feedback on the start to the term, and next week the governing body will be writing to you to elicit your views and invite you to forums on MS Teams to discuss the curriculum and impact of remote learning on your child. Please be candid with your responses and engage with the governing body as they are working hard to support the school at this difficult time for us all, which means supporting the students and challenging the school to be the best that it can be.

Our next steps

Over the next three weeks instead of timetabled lessons all students in Years 7-9 will take part in a 'Maximise Your Potential' session covering two separate lessons. We have used this company before in school, always to rave reviews from students, and this time we hope to recreate the buzz online. The company specialises in motivational sessions promoting good study skills, aspiration and confidence building, as well as offering practical tips on time management and independent learning.

Year 9 Options

We will be launching the Year 9 Options Programme over the next few weeks. This will involve all students receiving the Options Booklet through the post so that they all have a paper copy at their disposal and you will have the opportunity to discuss it with them. There will also be an online assembly with Mr Scholefield (Head of Careers Education, Information and Guidance), and an online session with Mr Wilkinson (Head of Year 9 Options) during a Core PE lesson. Students should then discuss their choices with their parents ahead of the Options Forms being completed using the Microsoft Forms format.

IT Investment

You should be aware that we have invested heavily in IT and this has been vital in providing a stable internet bandwidth for the demands of all staff being online simultaneously. Teachers are delivering on fast new machines and we have been able to ensure all our students can access the Teams lessons. Generous donations from parents to the Robert Carre Trust Gift, support from the alumni, as well as careful school budgeting means we have been able to supply laptops to students in need. My thanks go to our hardworking IT team who keep all our online delivery running smoothly.

Online Parents' Evenings

I am sure that you can imagine that a day on screen and then a three-hour parents' evening is proving quite a challenge for all our teachers. Taking this, and parent comments about students needing time to save, upload or complete assignments after a day online into account, we have decided that there will be three afternoons this half term when periods 4 and 5 will be given over to time outside of live lessons for students in Years 7-11 to catch up with any assignments they have outstanding, upload work or simply do some further reading or offline work of their choice

Sixth form lessons will continue as usual with students making good use of their non-contact time already.

Government consultation on GCSE, Vocational and A Level examinations

The DFE and Ofqual consultation is launched today and all stakeholders including students, parents, teachers and school leaders are encouraged to take part. Students will be encouraged to have their say in tutor times next week. You can access the consultation [here](#).

Food Hampers

You will have no doubt read all the negative press about the standard of food hampers being provided to some families across the country who are in receipt of Free School Meals. Our catering team delivers hampers to 20 families each week and travels over 100 miles to deliver the hampers directly to their doors. I am very pleased to share with you some very positive feedback from the recipients:



'After seeing criticism in the media and hearing criticism from parents with children at other local schools I would like to send my thanks to you and your team for the wonderful hampers being sent home for my sons. As a single mum, working part time, with 3 children I am eternally grateful for these hampers. I think that the content of these hampers is fantastic and you are doing an amazing job'.

'Please send a really huge thank you to Lindsey the catering manager and her team who have put together really fantastic food parcels for my three children which means that I can make a whole range of different, interesting and filling meals. The parcels have even come with a thoughtful note offering to tailor things to suit different tastes and with recipe cards with all the necessary ingredients included. There is always a great range of products including lovely fresh fruit and veg and there are always brilliant



vegetarian options for my boys like Quorn and Alpro products...they've even been thoughtful enough to pick out vegetarian stock cubes'.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

Again, the media keeps reminding us that for some students lockdown has been a tumultuous time in terms of mental health. In June the Children's Commissioner found that anxiety for young people had actually generally reduced - most of the 'everyday anxieties' around school or college, exams and peer relationships had dissipated and the worries there were centred on the virus. It remains to be seen how the latest changes will impact on young people.

Below are some organisations that can also offer support, but please do continue to contact the school if you are concerned about aspects of your child's wellbeing. Today we have launched our latest student wellbeing survey. We use this to track trends in our school population as well as to intervene where a student uses the survey to seek support or flags an issue.

Key Workers children - registration

You should already have registered your son for a key worker's place if you need one using [this form](#), which was sent out on Tuesday. Thanks to those who already have done so.

And finally....hopefully from the information above you can see that the school is adapting constantly to the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Our number one priority is to ensure the safety and continuity of education for all. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all individual acts of kindness and support that make this happen.

Have a restful weekend.

N M Law
Headteacher

This list of hyperlinks to organisations that can students and their parents with mental health challenges. It is by no means comprehensive but is intended as a useful reference for you in helping support your children whilst we are living through these unprecedented times.



YoungMinds (youngminds.org.uk) is a great source of advice, resources, toolkits, reports and workshops for children and young people.



Kooth (kooth.com) An online community offering immediate, anonymous online support for children and young people.



Shout (giveusashout.org). Text 85258 to receive immediate support, or go online to access support, information and resources to support mental health.

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The NHS – Every Mind Matters ([nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters](https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters)). Expert advice and practical ideas to help everyone look after their mental health. The website includes a special section for children and young people.

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Head Ed ([education.stem4.org.uk](https://www.education.stem4.org.uk)). Not only does Head Ed offer both quizzes, information and activities to help teenagers learn more about mental health independently, it also includes four free teaching modules for schools.

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Place2Be ([place2be.org.uk](https://www.place2be.org.uk)) offers student counselling, mental health support and training for primary and secondary schools across England, Scotland and Wales.
