



6th January 2021

School Arrangements to February Half-Term

Dear Parent/Carer,

On behalf of our school community I would like to wish all of our families a Happy New Year, although clearly it has not been the start to the year which any of us would have wanted.

As you will know from the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday evening, all **schools in England are to remain closed until at least February half-term, with only vulnerable children and the children of critical workers eligible to attend.**

The government messaging has shifted in recent days from schools being described as 'safe' places for children, to a new and revised assessment that schools 'may act as vectors of transmission, causing the virus to spread between households' (Boris Johnson – 4th January 2021).

We are currently experiencing a growing number of families requesting that their children continue to attend school, and as I said in my letter of 31st December, parents and carers must carefully consider whether this is right for their child and their family given that this extended school closure has been put in place to limit virus transmission (particularly the new and more highly transmissible COVID variant) amongst secondary school-age children.

We now know that **Summer exams (GCSEs and A Levels) have been cancelled**, but no details have been shared with schools about what form assessment and grading will now take this year. I am not expecting any further clarity on this for some time, as reports yesterday said that OFQUAL (the government's exams regulator) will begin to consult on alternative arrangements, with their statement adding that they are 'considering a number of options to ensure the fairest possible outcome in the circumstances.' This does not sound as though there is any form of pre-prepared plan for this eventuality unlike in Scotland and Wales. I shall keep families apprised of any developments as soon as further concrete information is received.

Clearly this situation is very unsettling for all families, but particularly for students and their families in examination year groups. I wish there was greater clarity and reassurance that I could provide. I have asked all of our teachers to convey the vital importance to Year 11 and Year 13 students of continuing to conscientiously engage with all of their subjects, applying themselves and completing all work set in exactly the same way as they would if exams were still the Summer end-point.

Whatever the grading process is determined by government to be for all of our qualifications, this will be fairly and consistently applied by all of our teaching staff so that our students will be well-prepared for any required assessments and – if we are given the opportunity - recommended for the grades that their ability and work levels deserve.

We have taken the decision to **push back the planned Year 11 on-line Parents' Evening from Thursday 14th January to Thursday 28th January from 4-7pm.** Further details will be provided shortly by Mr Grant. Apologies if this causes any inconvenience, but we felt that a slightly later date might allow further details to emerge on how subjects might be assessed, while allowing our immediate focus to be on developing home learning.

Year 13 mocks - which were due to start next week - have been postponed. Depending upon the government's decisions on how terminal assessment will operate this Summer, mocks may be re-scheduled once students can safely return to school. We considered asking students to complete these exams at home, but it is likely that examination boards would refuse to accept assessments conducted outside school as credible evidence if Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) need to be submitted by schools - as was the case for last year's students.

From next week all pupils in Years 7-13 should expect approximately **half of their lessons for each subject will be delivered as 'live' lessons through MS Teams**, with work for their other lessons set through *Show My Homework*. For Sixth Form students I expect – based on initial feedback from our teachers - that more than half of their lessons will be delivered as live lessons, but this is at individual teachers' discretion, as they know best the requirements of their particular course. All of the Teams lessons are recorded, so any student can re-run the recording of each lesson if they wish to re-visit any key area of their learning.

Pupils from all year groups should be submitting work to their teachers through *Show My Homework* and teacher feedback will also be provided through the site.

Pupils and parents may have experienced some issues yesterday with logging-in to *Show My Homework*. I understand that as this is a national platform used by many schools across the country, there were some capacity issues which the company is actively addressing. I am currently confident that these issues will be remedied shortly as it was a robust and effective platform during the first national lockdown from March 2020.

For students sitting vocational examinations (e.g. BTEC examinations for Years 10, 12 and 13) during January, the government has **not** cancelled these examinations, and these will continue as originally scheduled, in line with students' examination timetables.

All schools are seeking answers from government to a huge number of questions posed by the latest lockdown and answers are currently in short supply. I hope some clarity starts to emerge over the coming days and weeks, and I shall certainly try to keep all families informed on key developments. As teachers we like to know answers, so please be assured that we shall continue to lobby on our families' behalf so that we can all have as much clarity as possible with regard to what lies ahead.

Thanks as ever for your on-going support of our school and for your forbearance as we manage the significant and rapid shift from face-to-face teaching to remote learning. There will inevitably be a number of challenges related to this major process, and not everything will run exactly to plan, but if we get something wrong, we shall endeavour to fix it as soon as we can.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Guest', followed by a large, stylized circular flourish.

Mark Guest
Headteacher