

20 April 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

I hope this letter finds you and your family safe and well. I also hope that you and your children were able to enjoy some sense of an Easter Holiday together. We can at least be thankful that despite the necessary restrictions on our movements, at least the good weather gave us something we could enjoy during our permitted daily exercise, or whilst keeping busy in the garden!

School Closure

As you are aware the national closure of schools is ongoing. Although it may feel like a little longer, this is actually the start of our third week of closure. Whilst the news and different media organisations like to speculate about when schools might re-open, I can assure you that we will share factual information as and when we have it. Some of the online speculation is probably not helpful at this stage. What the Department for Education stated yesterday was clear:

'No decision has been made on a timetable for re-opening schools. Schools will only re-open when the scientific advice indicates it is the right time to do so'.

In the meantime, we remain 'open' for children of key workers and for those children who have been identified as vulnerable. Once again, I would like to thank those staff who have been coming into school to help supervise these children. My thanks also go to everyone who is helping by following the Government message: 'Stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives'. Let us all hope that the actions we are taking in achieving this will mean a return to more 'normal' life, once it is safe to do so.

School Work

Thank you very much to all the parents and students who completed the surveys about the first two weeks of online work. Our staff also completed a survey and the net result was over 600 responses to help us consider how we can continue to manage this process whilst we are not in school. Mr Cavill is going to write separately to outline plans for Years 7-11 and Mr Henman will do the same for the Sixth Form. There were lots of really good points made and a lot of recognition and appreciation of the time that has gone into this. Thank you for this and I have shared the appreciation with staff members where they were identified.

We will not be able to please everyone as some people think they have too much work, and some think they need more! The new plans have tried to take on board the issue that some students have faced by being swamped with lots of work set at the same time. We will review the situation again in a few weeks' time. I do want to stress that in these difficult times one thing we are not doing is looking to 'punish' children who have not completed work. If there is evidence of some students doing nothing in all their subjects, then it is very important that we make contact with home to make sure everything is alright. If ever students have struggled with the volume of work or with a difficult piece, we ask them not to panic and to email their teacher, or form tutor, to explain. The students have become more confident in doing this personally and it is very helpful for them, and their teacher.

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The Department for Education has also released their own list of useful educational resources. It is for both primary and secondary age ranges and you can view it using the link below. Whilst we are already using many of these, it may be a useful place to look for those who want some extra work. I also know many of our parents have primary aged children and these resources look very good.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-online-education-resources-for-home-education>

In addition to this, a new virtual school is being launched today called 'Oak National Academy'. Forty experienced teachers from the primary and secondary age range have been specially selected to deliver 180 hours of one-hour video lessons per week. The news clip below gives a little more information. There will be three hours of lessons per day for primary pupils and four hours for secondary school students. Our staff will look at these lessons very carefully as they are released and decide whether or not we use some of these alongside our own work. It is certainly quite an achievement to have created this 'school' in just two weeks during the Easter Holiday. There are lots of schools up and down the country who have not had access to online learning in the way that we have had via Google Classrooms.

<https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-williamson-backs-national-online-academy>

Contact with Home

I have asked form tutors to make a phone call home to parents during the first two weeks of this term. Most of them will do this from home and they have been advised to use the 141 service to protect their private number. The reason for doing this is to touch base with as many parents as possible and ask how things are going at home for your children and to see if there is anything more we can do to support them. If they are not able to have a conversation via phone with you, then they will follow up with an email.

In addition to this, tutors are also going to set up a 'Google Classroom' for their tutor group. This is not to set work, but just to keep in touch and it might be somewhere students can share messages and have some fun. Two groups who have trialled this have found it to be very supportive. As part of this, tutors are going to try having a 'Google Meet' with 4/5 tutees at a time in a video chat. If students do not have a webcam, or prefer not to be seen, they can just take part using audio. Equally, if students do not want to take part then they do not have to do so. We just thought this might be a nice way to have a group conversation and a 'catch up' about how things are going.

Free School Meals

We are now entering the 4th week of the national Free School Meal Scheme run by Edenred. Those of you who are involved in the scheme will be well aware that it has been fraught with some early difficulties.

Whilst we greatly appreciate this fully funded scheme, I think it was very ambitious for the Government to think that one company would be able to manage this for the whole of the country. I would like to publicly thank Mrs Warr who has been leading on this for Budmouth and who has been doing her very best to chase up late, or missed, vouchers on your behalf. The delays to families have caused much national concern and we hope that this will become quicker and smoother in the coming weeks. One marathon stint saw Mrs Warr sit through a three-hour phone queue 'on hold' to Edenred, which, alongside eight further hours that week added over £100 to her phone bill! The result was that after finally getting through, the missing vouchers were issued the following day, so it was worth it. We often talk to the students about the need to be 'resilient' and I think this was a good example of resilience. Thank you Mrs Warr!

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Positive news stories

If you are anything like me then you may have been enjoying some of the good news stories that have been shared in relation to some of the positive human stories in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic.

I think I must have watched at least five times the incredible 'Captain Tom' complete his 100 laps, what a wonderful achievement to have raised over £26 million. At the end of his last lap he said: *'At the end of the day we shall all be ok. The sun will shine on you again and the clouds will go away'*. Such a lovely message to hear and perhaps if they missed it your children might catch this clip on the BBC News website. Once again, resilience.

On a more local level our social media pages shared some thanks and photos of the handicraft of two members of our own technology team. Mr Walker's face masks and Mrs Fabbri's headbands have been gratefully received by Dorset County Hospital, local surgeries and care homes as help with the vital PPE. Teachers in schools across the county and the country have been doing similar and I am glad we could play our own small part. Thank you.

I know that we have many parents who are busy at work in what we call 'frontline' services. I really hope that everyone is able to stay safe whilst you do this incredible work and I think the weekly Thursday 8pm clapping has become a great way to share our appreciation and to stop and reflect a little. I am also aware that we have some older students who are also busy working in key areas including vital food supply and working in the care sector. I was very proud to see Year 13 student, Meg Lydford, being interviewed by the BBC news asking her about Coronavirus whilst working in a local care home. Meg's involvement with the care home started as part of her Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award and through her Health & Social Care studies. The training is now being put into practice at the time it is most needed; well done Meg. I know that you will be aware of other examples like this so I can only say thank you and well done to everyone who is doing their bit. Even if it is simply to stay at home, protect the NHS and to save lives.

I do hope that you and your family are managing as well as can be expected in these difficult times.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely



David Herbert