

13th May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I hope that this letter finds you and your family in good health. It is hard to believe that the closure of schools started on 23rd March. I would like to start by thanking everyone: students, parents/carers and staff for doing their very best in trying to keep learning going as smoothly as possible. Many of our staff are also parents and we know first hand how tough that is, especially as the time period away becomes longer. Tutors have been speaking with parents and holding small group 'video meetings' with their tutees. These have helped us to gain a better understanding of the difficulties in managing this process of remote and independent learning. Everyone is doing the best they can and up and down the country students are in the same position. If there is anything we can do to help further, please do contact your child's Form Tutor or the relevant Head of School in the first instance.

Moving to Phase 2

I am sure, like me, you followed with great interest the speech by the Prime Minister that was broadcast on Sunday evening. In the days that have followed, further detail and guidance have been issued in relation to how the country moves into its next phase of 'lockdown', with the new message of: '*Stay Alert, Control the Virus, Save Lives*'.

If you have found it personally difficult to understand what the key changes are, you are certainly not alone. This seems to be updated on a daily basis as more questions are answered and it can be hard to keep up. The following link contains a useful guide for what we are now permitted to do and this was updated yesterday. If you have not already seen it then you may find this useful from a personal or family perspective. I imagine golf and tennis clubs may receive enquiries from potential new members!

From the point of view of your children it is important to note that they are **not allowed to meet up with groups of friends, or to visit the house of a friend**. I can already see this message has been lost in the community where I live. They (and we) are only permitted to meet one other person in an open public place, e.g. a park, and even then they must remain socially distanced at 2 metres apart. I imagine that in the coming weeks some of our children will be placed under more pressure to 'meet up' and it is important that they understand this key point. It might be helpful if they too read the link below and discuss the implications with you:

<https://www.gov.uk/Government/publications/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do/coronavirus-outbreak-faqs-what-you-can-and-cant-do>

Potential re-opening of schools

As part of the changes in measures, the Government announced a provisional plan for schools to re-open for some groups of children as early as Monday 1st June. This will begin with some primary aged children who are in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. It is unlikely that this will be all students for all days and primary schools will be making plans on how they achieve this, whilst still enabling their children and staff to be socially distanced from one another and, therefore, stay safe. This clearly presents primary schools with a significant challenge and the task of ensuring that four and five year olds can remain 2 metres apart from one another should not be underestimated.

It is important to stress that these plans for re-opening are contingent on an assessment the Government will make on 28th May against five key tests it has set. These tests include the need for the rate of infection to be reducing. The Government has also issued guidance for schools to follow in order to provide the safest possible environment for all our students and staff on their return to school. We understand that in developing its plan, the Government has assessed that there is high scientific confidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they contract COVID-19 and there is moderately high scientific confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with COVID-19.

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What about Secondary Schools?

The Government has also asked secondary schools to consider how they could provide some face-to-face learning to supplement online learning for the two year groups who are taking exams next year. That is the current Years 10 and 12. It is their ambition that we would be in a position to achieve this before the end of June. The implications for achieving this successfully in a large secondary school are significant. I am consulting with colleagues within the Trust, my own staff, other local Headteachers and staff at Dorset Council.

At this stage, we have set no specific date when these two year groups might return for some face-to-face teaching, but I can tell you that **it will not be in the week beginning Monday 1st June**. I have been working closely with local Secondary Headteachers and we are planning to work together towards a common return date. The challenges we face in keeping our children and staff safe is a shared one.

Any arrangements that we make for a partial return will include the following key considerations:

- Students would be in much smaller than normal groups to support social distancing.
- We will be aiming for no more than 8 when in a normal sized classroom.
- The day would be structured very differently to minimise movement and potential contact.
- It is likely that we will have staggered start and end times for different groups of students.
- Students would not all attend at the same time or on the same days. With 260 students in Year 10 and 150 in Year 12, this would not be feasible, nor would it enable the small group ratios needed to ensure social distancing.
- We will be aiming to ensure some direct teaching in examination subjects from subject specialists, to supplement the online learning that they will continue to complete.
- The hygiene protocols promoted by the Government will be adopted, including washing hands or using hand sanitizer regularly.

As I am sure you can imagine, this will take a lot of organising and means significantly re-timetabling the students and staff. The logistics need to be considered very carefully. We cannot rush this process. It needs to be safe when it is put into place and needs to be worthwhile in order to have educational value. When I have more details to share about this process I will, of course, update you. **I would re-emphasise that the Government has said they will review their position on the re-opening of schools on the 28th May when they consider their key tests.**

In the meantime

Whilst these developments are being considered, it remains business as usual. We remain open to the children of key workers and some other vulnerable students. If your child is eligible and has not been taking advantage of this and you now wish them to, please contact their Head of School in the first instance. Online learning will continue to be set in line with the new schedule we started after your feedback at Easter. Year 11 will stop receiving GCSE work at the end of next week when they would have finished school! Mr Henman has written separately to Year 11 and explained that we will use the final half term to set 'Sixth Form Transition Work' using Google Classroom for students who are coming back into the 6th Form. In a strange twist this does mean that Year 11 will start 6th Form next September better prepared than ever!

At no point in the Government's various statements has any mention been made regarding Years 7, 8 or 9. It does appear to be the case at the moment that they are unlikely to be returning to school during this academic year. If this remains the case, we will further consider how we can support our youngest students. With primary schools they have indicated that they do hope Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 will return at some point before the summer holidays.

Finally...

I hope this information is useful to you. I know there is some real concern amongst parents up and down the country that the partial return to school might be harmful to them, or their family. If parents of Year 10 and 12 children make an individual decision to keep their child at home during this period of time, then please rest assured this will not be questioned and they will not be penalised. These are unusual times for us all and decisions like this can divide opinion. We respect your right to make the decision that you think is right for your child. We will do our best to provide a safe environment and some teaching that helps them to make progress.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely



David Herbert