

20th January 2021

Dear Parent and Carer

I hope that this letter finds you all safe and well. The start of 2021 has certainly not started as anyone might have expected. If you are anything like me, I am sure you are also hoping that a speedy and effective roll out of the new vaccines might allow us all to hope for better news about how we can lead our day to day lives over the coming months.

IT Server and Network

You will have noticed that this letter is being sent via InTouch and I am sorry that our IT issues have made communicating with you much more difficult at the start of this term. However, we have been able to get important letters out to you via other means such as Google Classroom and our website. Unfortunately, the news on our IT server is not good, however, with the help of external IT specialists everything is still being done to try and retrieve important data from our network. Although we have been able to reactivate an older version of our SIMS system today, this has unfortunately caused issues with some of the links to Google Classroom. As SIMS had to go 'back in time' it has affected any new student who joined us after the start of term, as well as anyone who had a class change during the first term. Staff are trying to rectify this as soon as possible. Any students who are concerned that they have gone missing from a group should contact their subject teacher in the first instance. Thank you for bearing with us and I would also like to thank our IT technicians for keeping us going at this time; it has been a very challenging few weeks for them.

Key Worker and vulnerable students' supervision

The school remains open to students who are vulnerable or where a parent/carer is classified as a critical worker. We have seen a significant rise in the second category and this is the same in the majority of schools during this national closure. The government has now strengthened its message in relation to using this supervision, after fears that the rising number of students attending schools will not support the intention of reducing the spread of Covid and the overall 'Stay at home' message.

The government advice now says: '*that parents and carers who are critical workers should keep their children at home if they can*'.

This may mean that some students are felt to be old enough to be left at home alone. It could also mean that supervision is only required on the specific days when there is no one else at home. However, at the moment, we are able to manage the current numbers and do not need to make any changes at this time.

Free School Meals Support

We are pleased that the National Voucher Scheme is now back in place. By the end of this week, all eligible families should receive their e-codes. Mrs Warr has been overseeing this process so please do get in touch with her if there are any questions: jwarr@budmouth-aspirations.org. Last year we learned that when these vouchers are emailed home from Edenred, they can end up in people's 'junk' Inbox so please check this carefully.

There has been a marathon team effort at the start of this week making up and distributing the food parcels that schools were asked to provide in the interim. The team at ALDI in Chickerell were wonderful in supporting this and went over and above to help. They also helped supply much more than the minimum amount and included some other essential items as well. Our sincere thanks are sent to them, their help and support is very much appreciated.

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Letters about cancelled exams

Letters will be sent tomorrow to Year 11 (by Mr Hudson) and the 6th Form (by Mr Henman) regarding the current thinking on how students will be awarded grades this summer in light of the cancelled exams. OFQUAL (the authority that oversees all qualifications) has begun a consultation on this process. These letters will be placed on the website, as always, if anyone else is interested. Whilst the final arrangements are still to be confirmed, it does seem clear that the system will be different from Summer 2020. Assuming that they are able to return to school, the preferred arrangement will include students completing shorter assessments that have been externally set by the exam boards. Although these assessments will be marked by their teachers, they will be externally moderated. The letters contain further details on this, but the message is very clear that those students who would have been sitting exams this year, really do need to keep up with their work and finish their courses to the best of their ability. We will be providing them with assessments to do from home so that they keep up this good habit. We do not want coming back to school and completing assessments to be a shock to them. Practice makes perfect!

Remote Learning

I would like to say how impressed we have been with the excellent levels of engagement that students have demonstrated working from home. Google Classroom now enables us to track work activity (not just a computer being switched on!) as well as the completion rate of learning tasks that have been assigned. It is clear that the vast majority of students are really well engaged and trying their level best, this is all we can ever ask. We know from feedback that some students are feeling a little overwhelmed by the volume of work and managing their time. We only ask them to do what they can and let their subject teacher or Tutor know if they are struggling. Mr Cavill sent out a very comprehensive letter last week about remote learning and the different approaches to it. As promised, he will be consulting with all staff, students and parents next week about this first period of remote learning and this will enable us to consider the programme for the final three weeks of this half term. The following link will take you to some further information about our Remote Learning Strategy:

<https://www.budmouth-aspirations.org/parents-information/virtual-learning/>

Consultation on School Day 2021/22

Those of you who were Budmouth parents during the Spring and Summer terms 2019 may remember that we consulted with parents, students and staff about the former length and structure of the school day ready for September 2019. Although no-one would have wanted to return in September 2020 with a very different looking school day (due to the Covid restrictions) some feedback on the forced changes was actually quite favourable e.g. the split lunchtimes. I have no wish to make changes just for the sake of it but I do think that following the feedback, it is appropriate to consult more widely on whether we might permanently adopt any aspects that have proved to be positive. We have now held two 'virtual' Parents' Evenings and this is another area that we will be seeking more formal feedback on as well.

I will send a letter in the final week of this half term with some different options we have been discussing and invite your opinion and feedback.

Thank you for your continued support.

Yours sincerely



David Herbert