



8/1/21

Dear Parent or Carer,

I hope this update finds you well and adjusting to the new national lockdown and the impact it is having on all of us since its announcement on Monday. I wanted to give you an update on our situation here, focussing on remote learning, key worker provision, lateral flow testing and exams in 2021.

This period of lockdown is markedly different for us all. We are for the first time balancing providing a full-time remote education to all students, as well as onsite provision for Key Worker and Vulnerable students in far bigger numbers than we have previously experienced. We are also committed to our pastoral and safeguarding duties as always.

All of this presents a big challenge for us and for our students, not least in all of us adapting to teaching and learning remotely in a way schools have not tried on this scale before. We have been really encouraged by the positive feedback we have had this week. However, it is a steep learning curve for us all, so your continued feedback and patience with us as we adapt to this new normality is so important.

1) Remote Learning

Thank you all for your feedback on remote learning this week. We are providing as close as possible your young person's usual timetable, albeit remotely, for the first time. We are doing this through google classrooms, supplemented by google meets. Every class apart from tutorial has a dedicated google classroom where teachers and students can post work, comments, questions and instructions. In most lessons teachers will also be using google meets to host live sessions where they can model and explain key and difficult concepts, and ask and answer questions.

We are modeling best practice to limit where possible the length of google meets. This means they may only be for 15 or 20 minutes of a 60minute lesson. In some cases the teacher may leave the meeting running to be able to answer questions students may have, or they may ask students to post questions or work on the google classroom instead. Teachers also have the ability to record the modelling phase of the lesson so that it can be posted on the google classroom - this is really useful as students can go back and replay it and watch again if they need to.

We know it will take time for all of us to adapt to this, but we are already impressed with how students have taken to the new system, the feedback we've had from parents and carers, and how teachers are developing and honing their practice.

We also want to encourage us all to stay healthy during this trying time. To support this, our PE team are developing some fantastic online PE sessions. Our pastoral team including our school counsellors will continue to support and check in with students. Our lesson approach will help us limit direct screen time for students and teachers. For example, teachers can set tasks that students can complete away from their screens using pen and paper, and then post back to the teacher by photographing this and uploading it to the google classroom.

We know some parents and carers will worry about the amount of screen time in this new way of working, and of course if families wish to limit screen time then we will not stand in their way, but ask that all parents and carers understand that as teachers we will need to continue to cover the curriculum content required.

As we expand onsite provision for certain students (see below) there will be times from Monday where some individual lessons consist of work set by teachers in advance. This will be because teachers are required to be supervising students in school. These will be kept to a minimum and typically would be one lesson in a subject per fortnight. No lessons in Y11 or Y13 will be affected in this way.

2) Key Worker and Vulnerable Student (KWV) Provision

As throughout the first lockdown, we remain open with staff working their usual hours and students attending on site who have been allocated a key worker place. Please see the link sent in previous updates if you feel your young person may require a place onsite because your work is critical at this time and they cannot work at home, or because they are vulnerable and cannot work from home.

Students accessing the KWV provision have been great this week. They are supervised by a team of staff both teaching and non-teaching and are following the same remote learning package and school day that all others are. Thank you for your understanding that we were not able to offer this provision on the first Monday of term, as it has taken a considerable amount of planning and organization.

If your child has an EHCP you will have received contact from the SEND team offering your child a place in school. Please ensure you notify the college through the SEND email should you wish your young person to take up their place. For all students with SEND needs where you have any concerns around their remote learning, please ensure you raise these with tutors so that we can look to provide the appropriate support needed.

3) Lateral Flow Testing

As with all secondary schools, we have been asked to support the DfE initiative to screen for asymptomatic carriers of COVID-19 through lateral flow testing. As discussed at our Q and A on Monday, we see this as another part of all the measures we have in place to try to keep everyone safe. Our staff have done an incredible job in organizing this so that our first staff members were tested on Wednesday (myself included).

Initially, our aim is to test all staff twice 5 days apart and then test them weekly from that point on (in line with Government guidance). We are beginning to test students who are on site from next week. Testing is always carried out with parental/carers and staff consent. The consent form for years 7-11 was sent to all parents and carers earlier today with the consent forms for 6th form sent directly to the students themselves.

We would very strongly recommend everyone who can to take part in this program as it has the potential to pick up infection before symptoms are noticed, which means we can reduce the chances of transmission.

4) Exams 2021

Parents and carers will be aware from the government announcement on Wednesday that summer exams for 2021 will not go ahead. Schools have been left to decide themselves whether January BTEC exams continue, which we have done as ours involve small numbers of students.

For Y11, Y13 and Y14 students, teachers, and parents and carers, this news will cause uncertainty as to what happens next. Gavin Williamson has assured parliament that contingency plans for replacing summer exams

have been developed before now, and just need 'fine tuning.' We have been informed today that we will have first sight of what the plans are at the end of February. This is hugely disappointing, as we all want certainty on how students will be assessed.

Our message to all exam groups is that it is vital to continue to work hard to cover and revisit curriculum content under teachers' guidance, and to assume that all performance in learning, be it mock exams, in class assessments, homework and classwork (including remote learning) will all contribute to their final outcomes and grades.

Thank you again for your patience and support in these difficult times. We are so proud of the way students, families and staff are rising to the challenges we are all now facing. We will hold another **parent carer Q and A online via google meets on Monday 18th January** at 4.30pm, and of course in the meantime please contact us with any questions or feedback you may have.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Salt', with a small dot at the end.

Alan Salt
Principal