

Hele's School

A great place to learn. A great place to grow.



4th September 2019

Dear Parent/Carer & Hele's Student,

Ransomware attack on Hele's School during the Summer Holiday

What has happened?

Hele's School fell victim to a serious cyber incident in the form of a Ransomware attack during the summer break. Ransomware is a malicious virus that targets organisations globally, large and small. In recent months, a number of media reports have indicated that this type of attack is becoming more frequent, with numerous major organisations worldwide being affected. The virus is usually deployed by organised criminal gangs, although individuals can launch an attack too, to disable organisations across the world by encrypting data and demanding a ransom to unlock it. Further information about the scale of ransomware attacks globally can be found at: <https://nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk/what-we-do/crime-threats/cyber-crime>.

Hele's School's IT team swiftly contained the attack and minimised any loss of data. Working with an external specialist support team, the recovery of school systems has been underway throughout the summer. This incident was reported to Devon & Cornwall Police and the National Cyber Security Centre (who monitor and advise on cyber incidents across the UK) as soon as the attack became known. As required by data protection legislation, a report was submitted, and guidance taken from the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).

There was no threat to the personal, financial or sensitive data held on the school management information system, Parent Pay or other web-based software used by the school; such information is not stored locally and was kept safe throughout this incident.

What are the implications?

It has been possible to recover all school systems and most of the information stored on the School Network. However, any documents saved on the School Network since the 1st May will have been encrypted - they are no longer accessible and there is no chance of recovering these documents.

Student emails have not been affected, but as part of the wider computer system upgrade student email passwords have been reset. All students will be prompted to reset their password when they first sign in to the upgraded system; time will be allocated on a rota basis in Tutor time over the first 2 weeks of term to facilitate this and IT technician support will be on hand, if required.

What happens next?

Hele's School IT team continues the work to upgrade School systems and ensure that full functionality is available to all users. This work is time consuming and complex and hence a priority order has been established, with examination groups and staff taking top priority, as one would expect. Should you have any issues or problems in accessing your work area or documents, then please report them as normal and the IT team will be in touch.

Principal: Justine Mason

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Tutors and teachers will support GCSE and A Level students to establish whether there has been any impact on an individual's coursework that may have been completed in the Summer term. Whilst many GCSE and A Level students routinely take a back-up of their work on a hard drive or USB, there will undoubtedly be instances where work saved after May 1st has been stored solely on the School Network and is therefore lost; the full implication of this incident will not be completely known until we have been able to review with individual students what work can still be accessed, which will be done in lessons over the next fortnight. Where an issue is identified, the School will work with the individual student to minimise the impact and ensure students are fully supported to complete missing work.

Queries or questions

If you have any queries about this incident, please speak to your Tutor in the first instance. If you are experiencing problems with your IT access, please report this in the normal way.

Finally

Please be assured that we will continue to provide the very best service to all associated with Hele's School, regardless of this frustrating setback for us all. ***We go into the new academic year having achieved the School's best A Level results and quite possibly the strongest GCSE results in the history of Hele's too! We are oversubscribed in our incoming Year 7 due to strong parental choice and, despite increasing our Pupil Admission Number by an extra 30 students in this year group for this coming academic year, we are full in Year 7 with a waiting list to join our school.***

In short, Hele's School continues to be a great place to learn and a great place to grow and we remain resolute in not allowing this cyberattack to distract us from our core purpose of teaching and learning! We very much appreciate your support and patience as we work to restore full functionality for the whole school community.

Yours sincerely,

Justine Mason
Principal