

# Hele's School

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



Friday, 10 April 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

In a much welcome, light-hearted moment on Monday this week, I was relieved to hear that New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, has declared the Easter Bunny an “essential worker” — if ever there was a need for chocolate I believe it’s now, and I’ve every hope that I may still get a visit from the Easter Bunny this coming Sunday!

Back to reality with a bump, however. As we gear up for the start of a new term on Tuesday and the continuation of home learning, please see some important messages below.

**Staffing Update:** I am so very sad that colleagues who left Hele’s at Easter have not been able to have the usual ‘Team Hele’s’ send-off that we usually afford our departing staff because of the rapid and unexpected closure. I would like to acknowledge the hard work and positive contributions made by two teachers who have now left Hele’s to move on to pastures new, and to thank them for all they have done over the years. Ms Dunwell (Geography teacher) has been covering for Mrs Davies throughout her maternity leave for the past year. The maternity contract comes to an end as Mrs Davies returns to the classroom (albeit virtually) from Tuesday. After 16 years, Mr Farmer (Head of History and previously Head of Post 16) has made a brave decision to leave the teaching profession (at least for the time being) and instead invest his time, energy and talent into the family business. We thank both colleagues for all they have done for Hele’s School and I’m sure you will join me in passing on the best wishes of all associated with our School.

For your interest, our planned process of recruiting new staff to join Hele’s School in September has not stopped. Indeed, I have been delighted and amazed in equal measure to see how many people have submitted strong applications and demonstrated a real desire to join Hele’s School, in spite of the uncertainty of the current time. Whilst we are obviously unable to conduct interviews in the manner we have become accustomed to, we will be managing panel interviews and directed activities through use of video-conferencing and other technology over the coming two weeks. I soon hope to be able to share with you the names and positions of seven new teachers to add strength and depth to our curriculum team: in Maths, English, History (Head of Department), French with Spanish, Art (Curriculum Leader), Music, and Social Science. Exciting times ahead!

**Home Learning:** The world of home learning is new for most of us and we need to remember that we are only five school days into this brave new world. Students, parents and teachers are doing a great job, but we don’t want this to become a source of anxiety for anyone; at its best, home learning can provide some routine and feeling of accomplishment. Experts say that people need to practise a new routine sixty-six times before it becomes a habit - we’re only five days in, so we need to give ourselves a break if we feel like we’ve been struggling to get into a flow! The good news is that the overwhelming majority of the School community (81%) logged in to ClassCharts each day throughout our first week of home learning, with 70% preferring to log on in the morning and set themselves up for the day ahead – what a great statement of intent to establish a new routine!

As the two week Easter break draws to a close, we need to get back into the routine of school work at home. To support with establishing good routines, for the first week of the new (virtual) term we’d like students to stick with the familiarity of their School timetable and continue to review their previous learning. If they are able to, we expect students to log in to ClassCharts each School day and complete the work in line with their normal timetable. Rest assured, teachers understand the challenges of this and are available by email if students need any help.

As we move into week 2 (week beginning Monday 20<sup>th</sup> April) and students have become more used to working from home again, we will relax our expectations for curriculum time spent on each subject and instead support students to produce their own timetable to show when they will complete the work set. We hope that this will give families much needed flexibility to work around other priorities or family commitments.

Each week we will endeavour to refine and improve what we are doing based on student, parent and staff feedback, so please do keep talking to us. For instance, the first survey we issued told us that students found quizzing really useful, and so we have fed this back to teachers and ensured this features heavily in our next phase of work set. We will use your feedback to keep our Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) regarding home learning updated to address any little niggles that appear along the way – the latest version of FAQs for home learning can be found on our School website.

We recognise that carrying on with learning at this difficult time really is going 'above and beyond', and so quizzes completed and work submitted will be rewarded with an Achievement Point to show how much we appreciate students' hard work and commitment. Let's get those points built up together!

**Keeping children safe online:** In response to updated guidance from the Department for Education published, some timely reminders about online safety have been emailed to all parents/carers and all students on Monday of this week by Mr Edwards, Head of Computing & ICT. This included links to articles that relate to e-safety, from potential scams that are in operation to how to change social media settings. Well worth a look, so please do check your email for this update and other, regular communications related to pastoral matters and wellbeing.

On this note, tutors will be making regular contact with students this coming term to check on well-being, keep up-to-date with any developments and generally offer words of encouragement and advice to keep a strong and positive link between home and School. These communications will be from the tutor's School email account to your child's email account. Please actively encourage your child to check their School email regularly for this important contact and also to acknowledge receipt/reply accordingly – don't forget, we are all struggling to get to grips with the current situation and are missing family, friends, colleagues and, of course, our fantastic Hele's students, and it is just as welcome for a member of staff to receive a friendly email as it is for a child!

**Free School Meal (FSM) Vouchers:** Michael Gove, Minister for the Cabinet Office, announced in a COVID-19 government briefing over the weekend that children in receipt of FSMs will have provision of food vouchers made throughout the Easter holiday - a U-turn in government policy that, until the weekend, had stated that FSM provision would be made during term-time only. Whilst we absolutely welcome this national policy change, this announcement came far too late for those schools, like Hele's, who were already half way through our Easter holiday. Please note that families in receipt of FSMs were emailed on Tuesday of this week with details of the government's new voucher scheme and with assurances that holiday provision will be made and backdated. Any questions arising from this email contact, please contact Mrs Hamblin, Finance Manager, at [hamblinc@heles.plymouth.sch.uk](mailto:hamblinc@heles.plymouth.sch.uk).

**Food Bank Referrals:** It is an upsetting reality that an increasing number of families have no choice but to rely on the support of food banks for provisions. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19, with an increase in people losing their jobs or having their livelihood significantly impacted by an inability to trade. Increasing numbers are eligible for Universal Credit, but this does not automatically bring an entitlement to Free School Meals for children – and if it does, this process can take up to three months to administer through local government. Please be aware that if you are struggling to buy food for your family, there are always options for help and support. I appreciate it isn't always easy to ask for help, but there is absolutely no shame in admitting you are struggling to cope – you are not alone! Please do contact your child's Head of House or Head of Year for a confidential conversation in the first instance; we may be able to make a referral to a local food bank to support you and your family through this difficult period.

**School Trips and Visits 2020:** Thank you for your understanding with regards to the impact of COVID-19 on planned trips and visits. We have been monitoring government advice and applying this across our School risk assessments and procedures and understand that parents may have concerns with the uncertainty around travel restrictions, self-isolation and social distancing advice. We are working closely with our insurance providers and tour operators

and receiving regular updates and advice, and please be assured that we will communicate directives as and when we receive them. We are doing our utmost to ensure the safety of our students and to protect payments that have already been made.

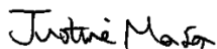
Please rest assured that you will receive refunds and this will be organised through ParentPay, but it may take slightly longer to organise given the volume of refunds we will need to deal with when given the go ahead to. To assist with this process, may we politely request you observe the following points:

- Please do not make any further payments via ParentPay.
- Please do not request individual refunds via ParentPay.
- Please do not email School requesting individual refunds.

If your financial need is very urgent, then please contact our Finance Officer, Mrs Goodman, at [goodmank@heles.plymouth.sch.uk](mailto:goodmank@heles.plymouth.sch.uk) and we will do our very best to help you as soon as possible. We thank you in advance for your patience through this difficult time.

Please keep safe and I wish you and your family a very peaceful Easter.

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason  
**Principal**

**Principal: Justine Mason**

Seymour Road, Plympton, Plymouth, Devon PL7 4LT

Telephone: 01752 337193 Fax: 01752 331460

email: [heles.school@plymouth.gov.uk](mailto:heles.school@plymouth.gov.uk) website: [www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk](http://www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk)

Hele's School is part of Westcountry Schools Trust. Registered address: Harford Road, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 0AJ  
A charitable company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales. Company number: 07398467

