

Hele's School

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



Friday, 8 May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I start by once again thanking students, parents, carers and staff for the way that remote learning is working and continuously evolving at Hele's School. I continue to get regular updates of work being done from across departments and I am hearing there is good engagement from all year groups under what we all recognise as really challenging circumstances. One cannot fail to be impressed and inspired in equal measure by the fantastic photos of culinary delights being created in kitchens across Plymouth and posted on the School website. I've even been spurred into action myself – my first bake in many a year – to whip up a batch of scones for a very British celebration in my household today to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day! Here's hoping they taste better than they look!

In a week when a high-profile politician imparted his views vociferously that schools are not doing enough to support children in this period of lockdown, and even wrote to Ofsted to demand a framework to judge schools during this period (which was thankfully rebuffed by the Chief Inspector of Schools), it is more important than ever that I thank the many parents who have written to me or my colleagues thanking us for all that we are doing to guide the learning of the children. It means a lot to us when families appreciate and acknowledge the hard work that is being put into lesson planning and delivery, as well as the efforts behind the scenes by support staff who are running the business and processes that are still going on to keep Hele's going. We are certainly all adapting to new ways of working and communicating, but 5 school weeks into lockdown (or 23 school days, to be precise), I'm very proud of the manner in which our whole School community has stepped up and supported each other. Of course, not everything is plain sailing and things don't always go as smoothly as we would wish, but that's why your regular and constructive feedback is crucial in helping us evolve our provision - please do keep it coming!

The most recent parent/carer survey results suggested that 98% of students check ClassCharts 2-3 times per week, with 37% of parents/carers checking ClassCharts at least once every day. You said that the amount and type of work being set is generally appropriate and manageable, but there are a couple of themes starting to emerge from your feedback. This matches exactly the planning we have already started with colleagues across the Westcountry Schools Trust and are exactly the things we will be weaving into our delivery model for the next phase of the remote learning strategy:

- An increasing appetite for some teacher-led delivery to introduce new content (whether pre-recorded lessons or live lessons) to supplement the tasks set through ClassCharts. *Please be advised and reassured that plans are already afoot to pilot this style of delivery through Microsoft Teams and to roll out to the wider community when we can be assured that staff and students have been suitably upskilled, that we have clear protocols in place for all users, and that all users have the technology to facilitate and access this means of learning.*
- A request by a number of families that don't have access to a printer or who are worried about the expense of ink cartridges with increased printing requirements, that documents be sent in Microsoft Word for easy editing on-screen, rather than PDFs. *This is a difficult one to solve to the satisfaction of all users, as we are aware that some families do not have access to a tablet, PC or laptop and are accessing remote learning through a mobile phone, and mobiles can read PDFs far easier than Word. However, I appreciate the challenges (and/or expense) around printing. I was made aware in some recent training of a very simple process to convert a PDF to a Word document for easy editing, which I share with you now. Please forgive me if I'm teaching you to suck eggs, but this was genuinely a revelation for me and a real game-changer! Surely, I can't be the only one who didn't know this tip?*

Simply save a PDF document to your device and then either:

- *right click the PDF and choose to open in Word, or*
- *open Word, click File then Open...then double click on the PDF to convert and it will be opened automatically as a Word document for easy editing on-screen.*

Progression to University: The Department for Education published guidance this week to Higher Education establishments. For families of our Year 13 students planning on going to University this autumn, there are some key points within the guidance that should give some reassurances with exams not taking place this summer. More places are being made available to help reduce volatility and ensure a fair and orderly admissions, with HE providers being allowed to temporarily recruit full-time, domestic students up to 5% above their forecasts next academic year. The government will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 ring-fenced for nursing, midwifery or allied health courses to support the country's vital public services. An Enhanced Clearing process has also been announced, with UCAS developing a new, personalised Clearing system for students this summer. This includes Clearing Plus, a new service which matches students to universities or other opportunities based on their achievements and course interests. If students' calculated grades exceed their predicted ones, it can automatically suggest alternative courses with higher entry requirements, making the process far easier than in recent years.

Phone calls home: please be mindful that if you receive a call where 'no caller ID' flashes on your screen, it is could be a call from Hele's School staff. Out of necessity, staff are having to use their personal phones or devices to contact home and will use 141 to withhold their personal number in line with our protocols. Some families have told us that they have been reluctant to answer a call from a withheld number, but we would urge you to please to do so to enable contact to be made. Thanks for your ongoing support.

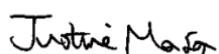
Online safety: The resources below are intended to provide you with support and resources to help you learn about online safety at home with your child or children. Please look at the guidance page first to familiarise yourself with available activities before going on to the activity packs. Guidance for parents/carers on the activity packs can be found at: <https://bit.ly/2Wr9CHF> , whilst the home activity packs for ages 11-13 are here: <https://bit.ly/2A0uKN6> and for ages 14+ here: <https://bit.ly/2SzxKXi> .

Staffing news: I am really pleased to be able to share the fantastic achievement of Geography Teacher, Lara Miller, who this week received official notification that she has passed her National Professional Qualification for Middle Leaders (NPQML). It has taken 18 months of hard work and dedication alongside the day job, and on behalf of everyone at Hele's I pass on my warmest congratulations to Miss Miller for a job very well done. Great news!

Government exit strategy: As we understand it, the Prime Minister will outline the exit plan for the country on Sunday, with attention given to possible softening of certain restrictions and a slow and gradual reopening of schools to some children once the 5 tests laid out previously by the government have been met. Undoubtedly, the return to 'normal' life will take quite some time and as we have been told before, we must all be patient and safe and do what is best for our community. It is important to stress that whilst we may yearn to return to our old way of life, we are all sensible and intelligent enough to know that the safety of our community comes first and we must ensure that any return is informed by scientific and medical evidence, and underpinned by a robust and ongoing risk assessment. Headteachers in the Westcountry Schools Trust have already started to discuss a recovery plan across all functions of our schools, which we will begin to share with families, governors and staff in due course. There has been no time scale attached to this plan as yet.

In the meantime, please stay at home wherever possible and stay safe and well.

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 website: www.heles.plymouth.sch.uk

Hele's School is part of Westcountry Schools Trust. Registered address: Harford Road, Ivybridge, Devon PL21 0AJ
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