

Hele's School

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



Friday, 29 May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I sincerely hope you've enjoyed some downtime from the demands of remote learning this half term. I was hoping to ease off on the communication this week, given it should be a break for us all, but it has been a particularly busy half term and it is important I pass information to you from the past few days.

Government announcement and guidance on secondary school reopening to selected students: Following the government's announcement on Sunday 24th May, and confirmation last night that the government's five tests had been met satisfactorily, I can confirm that Hele's will reopen in a phased manner to Year 10 and Year 12 **from Monday 15th June.**

The official government guidance states: *'We are asking secondary schools to offer this face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of year 10 and year 12 pupils, which should remain the predominant mode of education during this term for pupils in these year groups.'*

The directives go on to stress that schools can have a maximum of 25% of the cohort on site on any one day, which means that our students are unlikely to be in School for more than 1 day a week for the remainder of the term. Students will be required to stay in the same classroom every time they are in School, in a class of 9 students (arranged strictly by School staff), with a small and consistent team of staff, and their movement at social time will be very carefully controlled and restricted to particular areas of the site. It certainly won't be 'business as usual', as I've mentioned before, and there will be no opportunity for socialising with students and staff beyond their group of 9. We are, though, very much looking forward to seeing our wonderful young people again, no matter how different it may be for the foreseeable future.

If you would be interested in reading the guidance issued to secondary school leaders from the government, it can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/preparing-for-the-wider-opening-of-schools-from-1-june/planning-guide-for-secondary-schools>.

Likewise, the carefully considered 'Toolkit for Reopening' framework, devised by and used by all Westcountry Schools Trust schools to plan carefully for reopening, and which includes a clear risk assessment framework within, can be found in the COVID-19 section of the Hele's School website. Please note that once governors have signed off the detailed risk assessment and approved the delivery model for Year 10 and Year 12 provision, I will post a copy on the Hele's website for complete transparency and to help families decide whether you feel confident to send your child/children back to School. Our parent/carer survey issued last week had a high completion rate, with 234 responses from a possible 311 families – thanks for your support with this – and results indicated that 60% of Year 10/Year 12 will be returning in mid-June, with another 26% are unsure at this time. I recognise this is an uncertain and worrying time and you will have many questions, so we will produce a Frequently Asked Questions document for families, which I will share once all details have been finalised, to support decision-making.

Please be advised that I will write separately to parents/carers of all Year 10 and Year 12 students later next week with a detailed plan for reopening and required preparation, but will also share the key elements of the plan with the wider parent/carer body in next week's Principal's Update to keep all associated with Hele's informed on developments.

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Of course, throughout term 6 we will continue our best endeavours to support all other students remaining at home, making use of the available remote education support and ensuring a high quality offer.

EduCare provision: We must not forget, of course, that Hele's has never fully closed since having had to shut our doors to most students on March 20th under direction of the State, but has been providing an ongoing care facility through term time and school holidays for Key Worker and 'Vulnerable' children. We will continue to offer this provision next term and are looking to cautiously grow these numbers where *essential care* is required for *eligible families*. This is in addition to welcoming Year 10 and Year 12 back, so we need to proceed in a slow and considered way and ensure any risk is mitigated through stringent social distancing, staggered breaks and lunches and small, discrete groups that will be tightly managed. However, as a result of running EduCare over the last 10 weeks, we have established a good amount of knowledge about how best to keep children and professionals safe whilst at the same time ensuring that learning is productive, and this will translate to a growing provision.

Free School Meal Voucher Scheme: After the government had been clear that it had "no plans" to fund vouchers over this holiday for those in receipt of Free School Meals, we were surprised to get notification on Wednesday – half way through half-term – that there had been another U-turn in policy. Whilst we welcome this move for our families in need, the communication of change in policy came too late for us to take advantage of vouchers, which are normally ordered weeks in advance. I share the frustrations of our affected families, who I know have been reliant on this source of support during these particularly difficult times, but this was not in our control; let me assure you that we ordered our vouchers as soon as we were notified and eligible families will receive them in due course for this half term week.

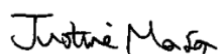
Staffing News: We have said a fond farewell to Mrs Kim Goodman, Finance Officer, who retired last week after almost 25 years at Hele's School, marking the end of a long association with our families and our community. We worked out that Kim has counted and bagged up over £250 000 worth of charity donations collected through various fundraising events during her tenure at Hele's – a remarkable achievement! I'm sure you'll want to join me in passing on our best wishes and thanks to Kim and her family for a happy and fulfilling future.

Looking ahead to September: We won't know for quite some time yet what the start of the new academic year in September will look like; like all schools in England, we will rely on government guidance and medical and scientific evidence to get all year groups back to some form of 'normality' when it is deemed safe and appropriate to do so. Please be assured that we will continue to work together to support our children as they return to Hele's School, whenever and however that may be, and will deal with the anxieties that many will feel after being away for several months, both sensitively and pragmatically.

It is important to note that any return to School is likely to be phased, carefully planned with the safety and emotional wellbeing of need of children at the heart, and will also involve children in the same year group returning together at an appropriate time. When the time is right to return, **your child/children will therefore not be returning to a vertical tutor group as part of the House system**, but will be with children their own age for tutor time. Needless to say, they will be well looked after and I know I speak for my colleagues when I say we can't wait for a time when we can have Team Hele's back together again!

In the meantime, here's to a peaceful and sunny weekend before term 6 starts on Monday!

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason
Principal

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