

Hele's School

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



Friday, 8 January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

At the end of another turbulent week, which started with news on Monday night of a national lockdown and an extended period of remote provision for all until February half term, and ended with confirmation that A Level and GCSEs will no longer run this summer and vocational January exams will now happen only *'if schools and colleges think it is appropriate'*, may I start this update by sincerely thanking you for the many messages of support and positive feedback around remote learning you have sent. COVID-19 is challenging us all and requiring families and employers across the nation to respond to ever-shifting sands and adapt to last-minute changes to our plans, but we are all in this together and that has shone through this week in kind words and thoughtful contact from parents and carers - it means an awful lot to the staff and to me, so thank you!

It's fair to say it has been a steep hill to climb for us all since the first national lockdown in March, but I'm incredibly proud of the wonderful team effort there has been in securing devices and skills over recent months to allow our whole school community to engage in remote learning and live lessons. Thank you for your ongoing support of this endeavour and your constructive feedback to help us make this provision better each day.

Walking around the building this week has been eerie and uplifting in equal measure; empty corridors, the few children on-site having earphones plugged into a computer to access supervised remote learning from a computer room, with teachers at every turn sitting alone in their classroom, yet talking and smiling at a computer screen, ensuring that 1300 young people at home are receiving learning in line with their normal timetable. I don't think many could have predicted such a model of schooling this time last year!

We have been so heartened to see the strong level of attendance and engagement in lessons, and we will ensure we find ways to reward the commitment of our students throughout this period of remote learning. Please do pass on my warmest thanks and congratulations to those beavering away at home - they have been exceptional!

A few things I'd appreciate your support on please, to ensure this provision is the best it can be:

- **Protocols for remote learning:** keep reminding children about the code of conduct for accessing live lessons please. Our expectations in the virtual world are exactly the same as in the classroom in school - students should be 'Committed, Respectful, Safe'. The protocols shared with you and young people previously (which are also on our website) are very clear and help to ensure high-quality learning can continue uninterrupted and safely so long as they are adhered to by all. Thanks for supporting us with this message.
- **E-safety:** children should not be sharing passwords under any circumstances or attempting to 'attend' lessons as other people. This is both against our code of conduct and the law and will be sanctioned seriously if needed. We will run a special assembly on e-safety next week to reiterate the importance of staying safe online.
- **Devices:** thank you to those who completed our survey where challenges remain in accessing learning because of limited access to a device or wi-fi. Mr Fonseca, Assistant Principal, continues to coordinate online learning accessibility and is liaising with families directly. Please be advised that we are working hard to commission a loan of rebuilt laptops from the Westcountry Schools Trust to support still more families.

In the meantime, there has been a really interesting development this week regarding the capability of games' consoles to access MS Teams and other applications. If your child owns an Xbox or PlayStation but not a laptop, it is possible to engage in live lessons through the console's built-in web browser: **open the device's web browser, go to office.com and sign in. Open the web Teams app and away you go.** I'm told it's that simple – quite literally, a 'game changer'! You may well wish to explore this as an option or choose not to put the temptation of working from a games console in the way of your child for very obvious reasons – the choice is yours, but it remains an option for you should you be struggling.

- **Safe working practices:** with increasing use of devices to access remote learning, it is worth sharing some useful hints & tips for children (and adults) who are laptop users. Please do run through these with your child to help them to stay fit and well during extended remote working:
 - Use the laptop as much as possible on a desk or workstation surface - do not work with the laptop on your lap
 - Use an appropriate chair - do not use a laptop whilst sitting on a sofa or easy chair, when lying on or in bed as it causes strain to the neck and back
 - Try not to slouch and make sure your lower back is supported by sitting back in the chair (you can use a folded towel or cushion, if you need further support)
 - Balanced and relaxed head position, not leaning forward
 - Adjust your seat height if possible so that your arms are relaxed and your forearms are parallel to desk with wrists in a neutral position, not excessively flexed up or down
 - Your feet should be flat on the floor or on a footrest
 - Your screen should be approximately at arm's length from you
 - When sitting, there should be one hand's worth of space behind your knee and the chair
 - Do not sit forward and crouch over the laptop
 - The top of the screen should be at about eye level
 - Angle the laptop screen so you can easily view the images with the least amount of neck deviation
 - Make sure that you rest your eyes from the screen for a few minutes every hour by carrying out other tasks

Examinations: decisions about January entries for vocational examinations are currently being made in consultation with students and parents/carers - all communication have been sent directly to those affected in Year 11 and Year 13.

In light of the announcement on Wednesday that this year's GCSEs and A Levels will not be assessed by formal external examinations in the summer, we await the guidance from OFQUAL before we make any decisions about how our teachers will determine your child(ren)'s grades. The best guidance I can give at this stage is for all students to continue to work hard, attend all live lessons and continue with the work set on Teams to the very best of their ability. We will continue to teach a broad and balanced curriculum to all examination groups, delivering the planned specification content to ensure our students receive the necessary knowledge and understanding for the next stage of their lives. Of course, we will stay in contact with Year 11 and Year 13 families to keep you abreast of developments as they happen.

Interim Assessment 1: an electronic copy of the IA1 report will be sent out on Monday 11th January to all year groups *except* Year 11. Parents/carers will receive a copy via email and then a copy will be emailed to students later in the day. Year 11 will receive their IA1 *plus* their mock exam results next Thursday, and this will be followed by a virtual assembly on Friday.

Please note, we plan to facilitate an opportunity in Tutor time over the next fortnight for all students to reflect on IA1 and set targets to improve with clear next steps to achieve these targets.

Virtual Careers Information, Advice and Guidance: there are some very exciting links for interested students in Year 10 and above to engage with employers in a Virtual Work Experience programme during February half term. Whilst taking part is entirely voluntary, it is a great opportunity for students to learn about the world of work and gain valuable employability skills.

Mrs Yeomans, Careers Coordinator, will email details to eligible year groups in a separate communication today. A reminder that Mrs Yeomans remains a good point of contact to seek advice or guidance, regardless of whether a child is in Year 7 or Year 13. She is always happy to support students who may need help in anything careers related and can be contacted at yeomans@heles.plymouth.sch.uk.

We would ordinarily run a Careers Fair at this time of year, where we invite over 30 employers, education institutions and training providers on-site to meet with families. COVID-19 constraints have meant that this can no longer happen, however we are planning a bigger and better (though virtual) Careers Fair for the end of January instead. This is an exciting development, so please look out for further details.

School calendar for Term 3: as with the Careers Fair mentioned above, we intend to run our planned events for Term 3 virtually. This includes scheduled Subject Teacher Evenings via MS Teams, the Post -16 applications for September and the Year 8 Options event, to name but a few. Details of each event will be shared nearer the time, but please be assured that we are looking to keep to the school calendar as far as technology and capacity will allow.

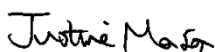
Lateral Flow Testing (LFT): we continue to plan to implement LFT on-site at Hele's before the end of January, despite having far fewer children and staff on-site. Mrs Crawford, Deputy Principal, will be leading on this piece of work and will shortly engage with parents/carers with details of what LFT is, how you can give consent for your child(ren) to be tested, and what LFT will look like at Hele's School.

Whilst we will use some Hele's staff volunteers to help administer the programme, we may need to look for further support with the provision. Please be advised that the Westcountry Schools Trust is looking to recruit to some roles to support testing across each of the WeST schools. For interested adults, a link to those details can be found in the 'Work With Us' section on the Westcountry Schools Trust website, [here](#). All training will be provided.

Wellbeing for Education Return: since the September return to school, Hele's has been readily engaging with training and resources to support mental health and wellbeing for both our young people and adults. The quality of this provision has been excellent. I'd like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to *Livewell's First Response Service*, a 24-hour service for adults aged 18 or over in Plymouth, helping to reduce barriers for access to support when there is crisis. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis or if you're concerned about someone else, please call 0800 923 9323 to access free help and advice. Remember, there is always someone to talk to.

Here's to a restful weekend and a more settled week ahead for all.

Kindest regards,



Justine Mason
Principal

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