



Dear Parents/Carers,

UPDATE: FRIDAY 20th MARCH 2020, 7pm

If somebody had told me a week ago that I would be writing this letter to you on a Friday evening then I wouldn't have believed them.

For all of us at school we probably have yet to fully grasp what has happened this week. Year 11 and 13 students who were busy studying at 4pm on Wednesday afternoon have had their summer examinations cancelled and probably won't be back at Helsby in Years 11 or 13 again. Students have said goodbye to friends this afternoon not knowing when they will next see them. We have colleagues leaving us this summer who don't know if they will work in the school as we know it again before they leave. But the bigger picture isn't about us - our sadness and confusion will be mirrored across all areas of society and the actions are felt necessary to deal with a much greater and important issue than any of our own individually as students, parents or members of staff.

I cannot praise the Helsby High School community highly enough for the way it has dealt with this week. Parents have been immensely supportive - you must have had lots of questions but have been patient in letting us deal with what we have had to do. Staff have been fantastic, supporting and guiding understandably anxious students whilst dealing with the same issues at home that we all have been. But the highest praise of all must go to our students, who have been so calm all week, showing a maturity beyond their years in the face of an uncertainty the likes of which we have never experienced ourselves as adults before. We will never be able to mark the end of Year 11 or Year 13 in the way we would have liked for those students, but there was a special atmosphere in school today and it was fabulous to see young people who have been dealt one of the biggest blows of all with smiles on their faces this afternoon as they enjoyed a long lunchtime (and hence final game of football) before embarking on the annual shirt-signing ritual in the spring sunshine - please do keep a look-out for the photographs on our Twitter and Facebook accounts. I have promised both Years 11 and 13 that we will definitely celebrate all of their achievements with us an appropriate time in the future.

Summer 2020 GCSE and A-Level Examination Results

You may have seen that late this afternoon the government gave its first indication of how it would award GCSE and A-Level results this Summer in order that the national Year 11 and Year 13 cohorts suffer no disadvantage as a result of the national crisis. Basically schools will submit teacher predictions which will be moderated nationally to ensure this summer's cohorts perform in line with previous years. There will also be an opportunity for students to sit their examinations if they wish to try to attain higher grades in both the Autumn Term and Summer 2021. Full details are to follow and I will certainly keep parents of Year 11 and 13 students informed as they emerge.

Monday 23rd March

As described in my e-mail earlier today we have in effect closed as a school this afternoon ahead of opening on Monday as a 'childcare provider' for vulnerable students and children of 'key workers' employed in key lines of national work at this time, students for whom there is no safe alternative to being in school. It is my duty to emphasise that children should only be with us if there is no alternative - it is the understandable desire of the government that as many young people as possible stay in their own home to slow down the spread of the virus in our communities. As emphasised in this afternoon's Prime Minister's briefing, the focus is on 'social distancing' and hence our young people should not be congregating in groups over the next few weeks and, more likely, months.

Thank you to parents who have already registered for our provision from Monday onwards using the contactportal@helsbyhigh.org.uk e-mail address. We will confirm receipt of your registration over the weekend and look forward to looking after your son/daughter from 8.45am to 3.20pm each day, with the option of a 4.30pm finish in the first instance as our Learning Resource Centre will be open until that time. As outlined in my previous letter, our provision will be very different to what a normal school day has been like until now, although the opportunity will be given during each day to complete the on-line learning set remotely for all students. Please note that school uniform will not need to be worn.

On-line Learning

From Monday school staff will either be working in school supporting the provision mentioned above or working from home supporting students remotely. For the next two weeks work has been set for all students on ShowMyHomework, with the facility to access teacher support and feedback via the ShowMyHomework messaging service or direct e-mail contact.

Where appropriate, resources will also be made available to students via RM Portico and the following e-mail addresses will be directed to our Progress and Pastoral Leaders (Mrs Turner, Mr Shelton and Dr Ravetz) for use by students and parents with any queries about their learning activities or any other matters at any stage:

Years 7 and 8 (Mrs Turner): year7admin@helsbyhigh.org.uk

Years 9 and 10 (Mr Shelton): year9admin@helsbyhigh.org.uk

Year 11 (Dr Ravetz): year11admin@helsbyhigh.org.uk

Years 12 and 13 (Mrs Robinson, Deputy Director of Sixth Form): 6thformadmin@helsbyhigh.org.uk

We will share with you the presentation shown to all students by their tutors this morning, which gives further detail on both access to learning provided for all students and the childcare provision in operation in school from Monday. As mentioned above please do not hesitate to get in touch with us at any stage over any matter in the coming days, weeks and possibly months.

Free School Meals

For the families of students who usually receive a daily Free School Meal the school has ordered a £25 food voucher for each student who will not be with us in school from Monday onwards to replace the £2.50 cost of each lunch for the next two weeks up to Friday 3rd April. We will contact parents/carers once we receive these vouchers and they will be available to collect from the school reception between 8am and 4pm each day.

Driving into work this week, the onset of spring with some warm sunshine, buds in hedgerows and daffodils in full bloom has only added to the surreal feel of this most challenging of times. Spring always feels like it will never come in the depths of a cold, dark winter, but it does - eventually. In the same way these current times will pass and life will return to normal again. We are a very strong community and working in different places and communicating by other means than talking face-to-face will make no difference at all to that sense of community. The building has closed to most students, but the school is much more than a building; it is a community who work and achieve together and so is still very much 'open'.

Please keep in touch - we certainly will with you. But above all, please keep safe and do everything you can to look after each other in the coming days and weeks.

Very best wishes from the staff and governors at Helsby High School.

Martin Hill

Headteacher