

YEAR 11 LETTER

Dear Parent/Carer,

Today is officially the last day of the Spring Term. Although I am sure that students will be ready for a break and a well-earned rest at the end of a long term and a particularly challenging last 3 weeks, I doubt that the usual feelings of excitement and anticipation that usually accompany the start of a school holiday will be present, such is the time of great anxiety which we are currently living in. In fact, although Year 11 students may not naturally admit it, I am sure they would rather be looking ahead to a fortnight of GCSE preparation and revision than being in the position we are currently in. I am though very proud of the way the whole school - students, parents, staff, governors and friends of the school - have all come together in recent weeks to play our part in these challenging times as a strong and supportive school community. As such I would just like to update you on some aspects of school 'life' from both this week and over the forthcoming 'Spring Break' ...

Summer 2020 GCSE/BTEC Results

I know that Year 11 students and parents will be very keen to learn about arrangements for the awarding of this year's results for GCSE and the other qualifications we offer. Hence I am sure you will share the school's frustration that the further details we were promised this week have at the time of writing (Friday morning) not been published. The delay is a probably a sign of the complexity involved in the process and hence I thank you in advance for your patience and understanding if it takes us time as a school to fully understand the arrangements and hence be able to share them with you. We will do so though at the earliest opportunity and I promise that we will do everything we can as a school to enable our students to receive the results their hard work deserve and which enable them to progress on with the plans they have made for September onwards.

One piece of guidance we did receive this week was as follows: *"On a practical note we would advise teachers and leaders that they should not be seeking any further work from students at this point to support teacher-assessed grades. Not all students will be able to respond; some will be ill whilst others will be living under more difficult circumstances at home. We believe the priorities for pupils in Year 11 and 13 are to ensure that they complete the curriculum in the subjects which they wish to pursue in the following year, not to add collateral to the assessment process."*

Clearly this helpful guidance should inform the setting and completion of Year 11 work at home and hopefully reduces one possible source of pressure at what is a challenging time for everybody, as hopefully does the promise I shared last week that all Year 11 students who have applied and been interviewed for a place in our Sixth Form next year are guaranteed a place regardless of eventual GCSE results received. It is definitely worth noting that this was no open, automatic invitation - after the cancellation of this year's GCSE examinations we carefully reviewed every single application and realised every one was from a student for whom Sixth Form study was a very natural pathway to progress on to in September. Hence we were able to make the offer to all and not just to individual applicants.

In School

School has once again been open this week for a very small number of students who require childcare provision at present. As well as providing an opportunity to complete the on-line learning provided for all students on ShowMyHomework, activities this week have also included production of 'NHS Rainbows' for display in the school's windows.

Thank you again to all parents and carers for all the arrangements that have been put into place to look after our students at home at much as possible in these unprecedented times. We are though open for those students with a 'key worker' parent for whom there is no other safe childcare alternative and we will remain so over the Spring Break. As outlined in my e-mail earlier this week, parents should contact us at contactportal@helsbyhigh.org.uk for further details. We will also open on Good Friday and Easter Monday if a need to do so is identified.

Thank you for all the messages of support for the school over the last few weeks and for the kind gifts which have been left for staff - please see our social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) for full details and pictures. We are designated as a 'community' school and never has that felt more the case than during the last few weeks. In the same regard we were delighted to be able to respond to a request from a local care home for some PPE this week and have donated some of our new, unused science glasses to help staff in their daily work there.

Free School Meals

Thank you to parents for collecting the Free School Meal vouchers issued in lieu of meals not being taken in school over the last two weeks. The promised national Free School Meal voucher system will be starting after the Spring Break and parents should shortly receive an e-mail to enable them to access these vouchers, worth £15 per week and redeemable in many of the major national retailers. Please do contact the school if you have not received this e-mail by the end of the Spring Break or if you have any queries regarding this scheme.

Students' Home Learning

Thank you so much for all the support you have provided our students with over the last two weeks as they have attempted to continue their learning at home - we fully appreciate how difficult it will have been, particularly when families have so many other challenges to face at this time. Hopefully the guidance we have received this week, and which I shared earlier in this e-mail, will reassure Year 11 students and their parents over what they can and should be doing at this time.

Students will now need a break and so as a school we not being setting individual lessons' work on ShowMyHomework over the next two weeks, which will hopefully give students a chance to catch up on anything they have not yet had chance to do. We are mindful though that many of the activities families would normally undertake during holiday weeks will not be possible and so we have provided some of our own via ShowMyHomework if students (and parents) are looking for things to do over the next two weeks. For Year 11 students these will take the form of activities which enable GCSE course content to be completed, which of course is especially important in subjects students are hoping to continue studying next year, and also transition material in the form of packs to help students as they prepare to study A-Level qualifications. Hopefully these activities, which are deliberately very different to normal 'schoolwork', can be a source of interest (and

enjoyment?) over the Spring Break - but I cannot emphasise enough that they are entirely optional and provided for students looking for things to do whilst staying at home following national guidance. Please do though feel free to contact our Director of Sixth Form, Mr Duffell (via 6thformadmin@helsbyhigh.org.uk) if you need any assistance accessing or completing the transition packs described above and in previous correspondence.

The national 'lockdown' we are all observing at present began on Monday 23rd March, with a promised review after 3 weeks, which would therefore take place in the week beginning Monday 13th April, the second week of the forthcoming 'holiday'. Following this review we may all be more aware of what the summer term will look like and as a school we will get in touch with you towards the end of the Spring Break to explain plans we have for the summer term on the back of national developments.

Well-Being

Without access to so many of the things used naturally to maintain well-being - visiting families, seeing friends, playing and watching sport, trips out and holidays away from home for example – Year 11 students will be no less removed from the challenge of maintaining their well-being at this difficult time than we are as adults. As a school we are keen to support our students as much as we can, during term-time and 'holidays' and hence please see the 'Support Services' section of the Students tab on our school website for a link to extra resources and support material for this time of school 'closure'. There is also similar material for parents available via the 'Support Information' section of the Parents tab.

In addition, colleagues in school are in regular phone contact with families we are aware would appreciate additional support during this unusual and challenging time. If you are not receiving this contact but find your child or indeed yourself facing challenges that it would be beneficial to talk through with someone from school, please do contact us via our SHARP system. There is a button to click on at the bottom of the school website homepage:



Whilst our school counsellor is not attending school at the current time due to the current restrictions on student attendance and social distancing, we are aware that the students who were accessing his service may well be finding the current circumstances even more challenging. We are working with him to set up a telephone counselling service for students who were seeing him in school at the point of closure and it may be possible to extend this service to other students in the coming weeks.

Staffing News

As with Mrs Tobin last Friday, today represents a rather unusual (and in the circumstances I'm sure unsatisfactory) 'last day' at Helsby for two of our colleagues. After 12 years at the school Mrs Keith is moving on to the post of Art, Design and Technology Faculty Leader at Oswestry School in Shropshire. I am sure all students and parents will want to join me in thanking Mrs Keith for all she has contributed to the school over the years as a Design & Technology teacher, form tutor and Department Leader. We wish her all the very best for the future and for her exciting promotion.

Also leaving us is Miss Chesworth who after spending the best part of a year working in our SEND department is returning to a teaching post at Oaklands Special School in Winsford. We wish Miss Chesworth all the best for the future and thank her for her work with our students this year. As with Mrs Tobin last week we are already looking forward to an opportunity in the future when as a staff we can say farewell properly to Mrs Keith and Miss Chesworth and hear about their new roles and schools.

As a result of Mrs Keith leaving, Mrs Stewart will be taking over as Acting Design & Technology Department Leader for the Summer Term - we thank Mrs Stewart for this, and also Mrs Spencer, who will be taking over much of Mrs Keith's teaching timetable.

As I began my e-mail by saying, I doubt any of us will be able to enjoy the next two weeks as much as we would in more normal times. Students, staff and parents all deserve though to have as much rest as is possible over the next fortnight and to enjoy time with their families. I hope you all keep safe and well - thank you for all your on-going understanding and support and please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via e-mail or phone if we can help in any way - we will make sure all our lines of communication, as well as our building, stay very much open over the next two weeks.

Very best wishes,

Martin Hill

Headteacher