



1 May 2020

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Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope all of our students and families are continuing to keep safe and well. A significant number of parents and colleagues have indicated to me that they have found this last week the most difficult of all since schools closed on Friday 20th March. The end of the glorious sunny weather we were enjoying might be one reason for this, but I suspect more than anything else will be the fact that the limitations, frustration and isolation we are experiencing in the ways we are currently working and living will now be inevitably having a considerable impact on how we are feeling about our lives, the effectiveness of how we are operating and the growing gap between the plans we had and the reality we're necessarily experiencing.

Increasing references to the gradual lifting of 'lockdown' restrictions in recent days have therefore I suspect been a source of cautious optimism for many. By the time I next write at the end of next week I expect we will have heard a lot more about this, including about the potential 're-opening' of schools. If next week's review of the lockdown restrictions follows a similar time-line to the previous one then we are likely to hear next Thursday afternoon about plans for Monday 11th May onwards. Hence please do look out for e-mails and regularly check our social media pages for updates throughout next weekend following such an announcement, although I will of course write before then if any relevant details emerge before next Thursday.

All the current suggestions appear to be that schools are most likely to open from Monday 1st June onwards. With the coronavirus being managed rather than eliminated at that point, it is likely that schools will need to operate the 'social distancing measures' we have become to get used to over recent weeks. This is likely to involve only a selection of students in our building at any one time, careful movement around school to manage 'social distancing' at all times and hence much planning and preparation in the weeks following next week's review to prepare for a 're-opening'. Please be reassured that we will keep you informed as much as possible during any such planning period.

Learning From Home

Thank you all so much for the on-going support you have been giving as our students have continued to attempt to progress their learning at home this week. This will inevitably get more difficult as the weeks progress. Teachers will probably now be setting some work which will inevitably build on previous learning done at home - without the understanding teachers would normally gain in a classroom as to how secure that previous learning was. As I said last week we are grateful for any routine and learning that students are maintaining at present and see it is our responsibility to assess and secure curriculum knowledge and understanding once students return to their full-time timetables in school.

We will continue to use ShowMyHomework next week to set and support learning and will then assess provision for the final 3 weeks of this half-term. This isn't likely to differ significantly if all of our students are still working from home but we are continually evaluating the best provision to make for our students, whilst being sensitive to the very different circumstances in which they will all be trying to learn at present which I wrote about last week.

Once we have a clearer idea of which year groups may return to school, and what their in-school experience might look like, then that may well be the moment at which we make any changes to our current provision. Students may be able to use their time in school preparing for and checking their home-learning for example, and if any of our cohorts are likely to continue to learn at home full-time for a significantly longer period of time then we will need to consider whether other approaches are needed to supplement the use of teacher-provided activities on ShowMyHomework. At this stage we are also likely to have some staff working in school and some working at home, which will further complicate issues as currently all staff are working from home and hence able to set and support ShowMyHomework learning for their own classes during the working day.

Laptops

We have this week received further details regarding the laptop scheme announced by the Education Secretary on Sunday 19th April. The actual number of laptops involved may well be less than originally anticipated and at present schools have only been asked to consider providing them to Year 10 students who are currently unable to access any learning from home. We will be in touch with these students in due course.

Childcare Provision

Please do continue to use the contactportal@helsbyhigh.org.uk e-mail address for enquiries about our childcare provision, including to let us know if you would require the provision to be available at the forthcoming Bank Holiday next Friday (8th May).

Summer 2020 GCSE and A-Level Results

The Ofqual consultation on the awarding of GCSE and A-Level results closed on Wednesday of this week. Hence we are likely to be able to share further details regarding this process with Year 11 and 13 students in the near future and we are exceptionally appreciative of their patience over such an important issue. We are also grateful in advance for their understanding that if finalised, consultation proposals will prevent us from sharing individual details of our work in this area as it is likely that schools will be directed not to discuss their generation of data to inform the awarding process with students or their parents.

Free School Meal Scheme

Although still not perfect, the national voucher scheme in lieu of Free School Meals not currently being taken in school does appear to be offering support for eligible families. Please do let us know (via contactportal@helsbyhigh.org.uk) if we can assist and please also be aware from this week the vouchers can now also be used at Aldi and McColl's stores.

As I starting this letter by saying, these days are not pleasant, but they are relatively straightforward in terms of our educational provision, ie students and staff all doing their best to successfully learn and work from home. On the horizon is a much happier time when hopefully we will soon be able to see our students again in school - but although that will represent a significant step in the right direction as some aspects of our lives make a very welcome return, it will also represent a time of much greater complexity and also significant and understandable concern as students leave their homes and re-enter a wider world where Covid-19 will still exist despite all the 'social distancing' and other measures that will be put into place throughout society.

Hence not only do I want to thank you for all the support that you have given both to students and the school during recent weeks, but I also want to thank you in advance for the way I know you will work with us to make the forthcoming weeks and months work successfully too, whatever the next stage asked of us looks like and whenever that may arrive. Communication and understanding will be key and hence please do not hesitate to get in touch with us via any of the means I described last week if you have any query about anything at any stage. Ultimately it is the strength of the partnership between parents and the school that will enable our young people to deal with the short-term, recover from the disruption to their lives in the medium-term and then thrive once again in the future.

Very best wishes,

Martin Hill
Headteacher