



Head Teacher:
Martin Hill B.Sc. Hons, NPQH
Chester Road, Helsby,
Frodsham WA6 0HY
Tel: 01928 723 551
Email: head@helsbyhigh.org.uk
www.helsbyhigh.org.uk

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Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope all of our students and families are continuing to keep well as we head towards the end of what has been a very unusual term - one I am sure none of us will want to experience again any time soon. A real highlight for form tutors this week though has been speaking to our students by phone. They have really enjoyed finding out from both parents and the children themselves about how they have been coping with working and learning at home, as well as their other adventures over the last few months. I know how much my colleagues have valued the opportunity to make contact with their tutees in this way ahead of the summer - and I hope that feeling was shared by our students too.

'Vulnerable Student and Key Worker Children School'

Please do continue to use the contactportal@helsbyhigh.org.uk address to access our 'childcare' provision during the final two weeks that this provision will be available. We received the official confirmation from the Department for Education this week that schools in England are not expected to continue to offer this provision over the summer holiday.

'Year 10 and 12 Supported Home Learning School'

We continue to be very impressed with the attendance and maturity of our Year 10 and 12 students as they learn in school for one day each week, working with all of their teachers in all of their subjects as they do so. Staff also continue to be delighted with the work they are doing at home - thank you to parents for their support of this. We are finding the sessions incredibly useful in terms of finding out where our students are up to and informing our teaching provision next term and I hope that our students are finding the sessions equally useful. There is just one reminder that I would like to give the small number of students who travel to school by bus - the wearing of face-coverings is now mandatory on all of our transport providers. Students risk not being allowed on the buses if they do not have their own covering with them.

'Remote Learning School'

I know I thank parents every single week for their support of our students' home-learning - and I think it is entirely right that I do so. Just because learning from home has probably now become 'normal' doesn't mean that it will be getting any easier. It continues to be the case that keeping up good learning habits and routines is just as important as the actual learning content itself. Please look out for some 'virtual' equivalents of usual summer term events over the next couple of weeks, with an Activity Day, a Sports Day and Celebration Assemblies all currently being planned for the final week of term.

Year 11

I hope that our Year 11 students in particular are keeping well - this week will have been a poignant one for them as it would have been their 'Prom Week'. I hope that the Farewell Assembly provided via ShowMyHomework and the surprise that will be on its way in the post make up a little bit for the lack of the usual celebratory activities. If students/parents think that they may have missed out on either of these then please get in touch with us and let us know.

Some of the usual elements of reaching the end of Year 11 have very much been possible though. Year 11 'hoodies' have been ordered and thanks to some fantastic 'remote' working from the Year 11 Yearbook student team and Dr Ravetz, the challenges of the recent months haven't prevented the production of what will hopefully be a wonderful keepsake for students. Unfortunately, current guidelines prevent hoodies and yearbooks from being collected from school, but they will be available on Year 11 Results Day in August.

Summer Exam Results Days

We'll be in touch with Year 11 and 13 students over the next couple of weeks with details of arrangements for them to come into school to collect their GCSE, A-Level and vocational qualification results in August. For now, particularly as families may currently be contemplating the possibility of a summer holiday, I just wanted to provide a reminder of the dates:

Year 13	Thursday 13 th August
Year 11	Thursday 20 th August

Autumn Term Examinations

Of particular interest to Year 11 and 13 students and their parents will be the publication by Ofqual, the regulatory body for qualifications, examinations and assessments in England, of their finalised plans for GCSE and A-Level examinations in the Autumn Term for Year 11 and 13 students who may wish to try to improve upon the grades they receive this August. Their response to the consultation can be found at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/896446/Autumn_Series_2020_Consultation_Decisions_300620.pdf

The main aspects of the plans are as follows:

- There will be a full A-Level examination season in October and a GCSE season in November, with all subjects available and the same number and format of examination papers as would have been the case in this summer's postponed examinations.
- With the exception of Art, the difficulty of students undertaking any practical work after leaving their previous education institutions means that the grades awarded will be based upon examination performance only, even in subjects where there is usually a considerable practical element, such as Music or PE.
- In GCSE and A-Level Art, students will undertake a new one-off task under supervised conditions, with grades based on their performance in that task alone.

Whilst any opportunity to try to improve upon grades appears to be an appealing one, the decision regarding whether or not to pursue this option needs to be very carefully thought-through, particularly in regard to potential impact on subsequent qualifications being studied. Hence we will provide more advice and guidance on this, both in writing in advance of August and in person on the Results Days themselves.

September

I am sure that all of our students and parents will be aware that the last couple of days have been hugely significant, with the news that the government intends all students to return to school full-time at the start of the Autumn Term. This straightforward intention is understandably accompanied by the need for some very complex planning at both school and Local Authority level, as outlined in the following Department for Education materials:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-in-the-autumn-term>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>

We will of course provide parents/carers with as much information as we can, as soon as we can. Because of the complexity of the plans that require construction, and the unpredictability of the national coronavirus situation between now and early September (which is still two months away) I am not expecting to be in a position to provide parents with full details of the September return before the end of this term in two weeks' time. I would therefore request that parents keep checking e-mails throughout the summer holidays and thank you in advance for your patience and understanding that it may well be late August before all of the detail will be available. We will though endeavour to provide the information which is most crucial for parents - start dates, uniform requirements, etc - as soon as possible as we appreciate that this information is needed for families to plan their lives in September.

Summer 2021 GCSE and A-Level Examinations

This week Ofqual published its proposals for amendments to examinations next summer for Year 10 and 12 students in light of the disruption to their studies this year. The consultation, which invites responses from all stakeholders, including parents and students, closes on Thursday 16th July and can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/proposed-changes-to-the-assessment-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2021>

Two of the main proposals are for a later examination season in 2021, with examinations beginning in June rather than mid-May, which had become the norm in recent years, and changes to assessment arrangements in individual subjects to create extra teaching time wherever possible. Further detail on proposals for vocational subjects should follow shortly.

Looking Ahead

What the publication of both of the above sets of documentation does, the plans for the September full re-opening of schools and for the Summer 2021 GCSE and A-Level examinations, is to enable teaching staff to do what they have been waiting to do for so long now - which is to start planning for when students return to classrooms. Until now the task of taking all of the learning which they have been so impressively undertaking at home, shaping and embedding it in order to get our students back on track, has been difficult to plan for because of the lack of certainty over return dates and next year's GCSE and A-Level arrangements.

Thanks to their and your efforts, our students' learning won't have stood still since March but inevitably it may have got a little 'out of sync'. Our work with Year 10 and 12 students in the last few weeks has revealed that students have learned far more successfully than they realise during lockdown - restoring students' confidence will be just as important as identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge and understanding.

I know I speak on behalf of all of my colleagues when I say how much we are looking forward to helping our students on their return to school. I still maintain that, along with all staff in schools, teachers' biggest contribution to this global crisis will actually be after it will have appeared to have passed. It will be when they work with parents over weeks and months to support students after what they have been through, making sure there is no long-term impact on their happiness, learning and life prospects after what has sadly happened during their precious childhood years.

Best wishes,

Martin Hill
Headteacher