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Dear Parent/Carer,

As we reach the end of a highly unusual half-term, the main message in this week's letter has to be a huge 'well done' to all of our students and their families for the way they have coped, and in many cases thrived, since the start of January. We are acutely aware that the support of parents has been absolutely vital to their coping and so an equally big 'thank you' to parents, who will have guided and encouraged in ways we will probably never even know about. After 6 weeks our current ways of working really do now seem like 'normal' but I'm sure one day in the future we will look back and think "Did we really do that?" and everybody will have good reason to feel very proud of what they did during an unprecedented time.

Half-Term

With schools fully closed to all children, next week will be a chance for students and families to take a break after a challenging half-term. We are still in a serious national lockdown situation though and Cheshire West and Chester have compiled a list of support available to families over the half term, including information on community food support and financial help through the Winter Grant scheme ([read the full press release](#)). A list of useful resources and information for the half term can be found on their website at: www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/halftermsupport

After Half-Term

All the current indications are that much more clarity about the rest of this academic year will emerge in the first week back after half-term, with both the national 'routemap' out of lockdown and the Summer 2021 grade-awarding plans due out in the week beginning Monday 22nd February, possibly even on Monday 22nd itself.

What we do know for now though is that the first two weeks after half-term will see a continuation of our work this half-term, with the vast majority of students having 'live' lessons at home and just key worker and vulnerable student provision on site.

Monday 8th March is then the date when students could start to return to the building, although which students, what measures will be required in school and how mass testing might support the return of students will all become known straight after half-term.

Remote Learning

Lessons will begin again via Microsoft Teams on Monday 22nd February and continue for at least the first two weeks after half-term. As mentioned in last week's letter, the only significant change to arrangements is the new timings for the lessons in order to try to create longer breaks from screens and common break and lunchtimes for all students:

8.45-8.55 – form time
9.00-9.50 – lesson 1
9.50 – 10.00 – comfort break
10.00-10.50 – lesson 2
10.50 – 11.30 – 40 minutes for break 1
11.30 – 12.20 – lesson 3
12.20 – 12.30 – comfort break
12.30 – 1.20 – lesson 4
1.20 – 2.10 – 50 minutes for break 2
2.10 – 3.00 – lesson 5

We have tried to spread the 5 lessons out each day as much as possible and in doing so roughly replicate what used to be our 'normal' lesson timings in school, with a 2:2:1 lesson 'split' and longer breaks after every two hours of lessons. We will review these timings again if remote learning is continuing for any of our students beyond Monday 8th March.

Key Worker and Vulnerable Student Provision

Please continue to use the contactportal@helsbyhigh.org e-mail address for queries about, or access to, our on-site provision after half-term.

Free School Meal Vouchers

Please note that the national 'Edenred' scheme will continue to operate for the first two weeks after half-term to provide support in the form of vouchers to families in lieu of meals not being taken in school.

Year 9 Options

The Year 9 options process will begin in earnest after half-term with a focus on the different courses available in lessons in the first week back and then a 'live' Options Evening on Monday 1st March. We have adapted our processes this year to try to provide as much information as possible to support decision-making in the unusual circumstances and thank you in advance to parents for the support and guidance which I know you will give to our students.

Proposed Frodsham to Helsby High School Cycle Path

A reminder of the Friday 19th February deadline over half-term to respond to the Local Authority's proposals for a cycle path for our students alongside the A56 (see [Inside Cheshire West and Chester - Home](#)). As a school we will ourselves be submitting a response to the proposed plans. We are very supportive of any developments which enable our students to be able to cycle to school more easily but are also very keen that plans are as safe as possible for students, parents and road-users, particularly given how busy the area around school is at the start and end of the school day.

Staffing News

Welcome back to Mrs Lewis, who re-joins us after half-term following her maternity leave, albeit in very different circumstances for at least the first couple of weeks of next half-term. Welcome back also to Mr Morfett, who will be re-joining us on a permanent basis as Senior ICT Technician having previously worked in our ICT Support team for a number of years before (temporarily) leaving us last spring.

After such an intense few weeks I'm sure that our students will be really looking forward to a well-deserved break next week, not least I suspect from computer screens. I hope all of our students and their families have an enjoyable half-term and a chance for some rest and relaxation. Please do try to ignore the 'noise' - the speculation and the counter-speculation - that will inevitably grow over the week about the re-opening of schools; students should instead focus on having a proper break ahead of what is bound to be another challenging half-term, whatever national plans emerge for schools. Hopefully over half-term the weather will get a little warmer, the days will get longer and the beginning of spring will signal the promise of much better times ahead.

Best wishes,

Martin Hill
Headteacher