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Dear Parent/Carer,

I am sure that all of our students are looking forward to the forthcoming Spring Break. Although we have only been back in school for a few weeks, it has been a uniquely demanding term and the holiday will give students chance to recharge and prepare for an important period ahead in school. Indeed, I would like to use most of this letter to look forward to the forthcoming Summer Term ...

Lateral Flow Device Testing

Thank you to all our students who are participating in the voluntary home-testing programme, which I expect to continue for some time to come yet. A reminder that students should take the test on Mondays and Fridays - Monday is particularly important as then no other students will be required to self-isolate in the event of a positive test as they will not have been in 'close contact' in school in the preceding two days. Events such as last week, when a number of Year 10 students had to go home as a result of a positive home-test result, are unfortunately likely to become a feature of Fridays in school for the foreseeable future. With 'false positive' results reported to be approximately 1 in a 1,000 it was not a significant surprise when the good news that the confirmatory PCR test result was negative then came through the following day.

The tests do though spot people with Covid who are asymptomatic or whose symptoms have yet to emerge and so they are a very important way in which the virus can be prevented from being unknowingly passed on. For that reason the government has asked that students continue to home-test over Easter and hence we will providing further kits next week for that purpose.

School Uniform

With lockdown still in place over the last few weeks, it has been understandable that not all students have been able to wear the correct full school uniform whilst access to, or delivery of, new uniform has been awaited. Please though could the next 3 weeks be used to ensure that all students are fully prepared with correct uniform for the start of the Summer Term on Monday 19th April. Uniform is an important part of students' sense of belonging and also of the setting of high expectations of student conduct across in school. Thank you in advance for your co-operation with this.

Winter Grant Scheme

Parents will be aware that the government set up a 'Winter Grant Scheme', providing Local Authorities with funding to support families directly rather than continuing the Free School Meal Voucher Scheme over holiday periods. Ahead of the forthcoming Spring Break Cheshire West and Chester have forwarded these funds to individual schools in the form of £35 per eligible student. Hence we will shortly be contacting eligible families by e-mail to provide them with £35 e-vouchers and so it is very important to look out for this communication when it is sent over the next few days.

Covid 'Ways of Working'

We are currently awaiting any indications of whether, how and when the 'hierarchy of controls' (such as the wearing of face-coverings in classrooms or minimising corridor movement) which are currently expected of schools will be relaxed in line with the lifting of restrictions in the wider society. I am hopeful though that at some stage next term we will be able to allow greater student movement around school, giving students access to specialist classrooms and an inevitably richer and more varied curriculum experience. In particular I know that all colleagues are looking forward to seeing the faces of our Year 7 students when they see science laboratories, art studios and technology workshops for the first time since they joined us last September.

Summer 2021 Grade Awarding

Of all the many frustrations of the last 12 months, none has been greater than our current inability to give our Year 11 and 13 students precise details about how their grades will be awarded this summer. This week's teacher-update from Ofqual, [Submission of teacher assessed grades, summer 2021: info for teachers - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/submitting-teacher-assessed-grades-summer-2021) only re-emphasised the need to wait to hear from the exam boards about what evidence can be used to determine grades.

I know that some schools and colleges have tried to predict what may be possible and have gone public with their proposed assessment plans, which will probably only have served to unnerve our students even further. Thank you for your understanding and support of our approach, which is to only confirm our plans once we know that they are in line with what is recommended.

What I can confirm is that any remaining Year 11 and 13 assessment, of which there is likely to be a significant amount, will take place over a 5 week window from Monday 26th April to Friday 28th May. We will use the first week back after the Spring Break, the week beginning Monday 19th April, as a preparatory week ahead of that window. Because of our wait for exam board information we cannot currently tell students precisely what they may need to revise and it is tragic that I cannot even guarantee students who have suffered so much already that we and they will know that by the time we finish next Thursday. All I can promise is that we will work exceptionally quickly to continue to give them as much information as we can at all times.

Also currently awaited is national direction regarding summer term attendance this year and what the expectations will be of Year 11 and 13 students in the second half of the summer term once their assessment window is complete. As soon as we know when their 'leaving date' is then we will of course let students and parents know.

Year 7/8/9/10/12 Assessment

An important part of our work in the summer term will be providing students with information on their academic progress, which will be even more important than ever after such a disrupted school year. This is of course a feature of schools' work every summer term, but they don't usually need to do it alongside carrying out the high-stakes assessment of Year 11 and 13 themselves in the way that the exceptional circumstances requires us to this year. Hence managing these demands over the forthcoming 12-week period will be a very significant challenge. Further details will follow but the hopefully the following provides a helpful overview of our plans in this area:

- The Year 10 assessment window will take place in the first week after the Easter break. Please see [Year 10 Assessment Week - Helsby High School](#) for full details.
- Assessment windows for Years 7, 8, 9 and 12 will take place in June and July (ie in the second half of the summer term).
- Each assessment window will be followed up by the provision of key progress information. This report will be accompanied by an on-line parent consultation evening which will give the opportunity for teachers to provide detailed feedback on progress and also a chance for parents and students to discuss any specific issues or concerns.

Hopefully the above will allow students and parents to end the summer with a clear understanding of where learning is up to ahead of what will hopefully be a much more straightforward 2021-22 academic year.

I hope the above provides a helpful update and insight into the next few months. As always, thank you for your continued support and please do not hesitate to contact us with any queries at any stage. In the immediate future, I hope you all have a very pleasant weekend ahead of the final week of what has been a very unusual Spring Term.

Very best wishes,

Martin Hill
Headteacher