

Friday 1 May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope and trust that you are continuing to keep well and safe.

Not including the Easter break, it has now been some four weeks that our students have not been in school, and whilst of course we continue to look forward to the day where we can welcome all our students back, I want to make sure that we keep in close contact with you in the meantime, and — to reiterate the sentiment of my letter of 26 April — to remind you that we are thinking of you and our students, and that we are here to support, advise, guide or just listen. Again, please do reach out if you need any support and we will make every effort to do what we can to help, or to find and put you in touch with those who can.

Since the temporary closures of schools was announced by HM Government, we have done — and continue to do — whatever we can to ensure that our students are supported, both in terms of securing effective remote learning opportunities, and in terms of supporting their welfare. Let me assure you also that we are continuously reflecting as a College on what we are doing, evaluating the effectiveness of the support we are providing, and considering what more we may be able to do, or, indeed, what we may be able to do better. Of course, if there is anything more that we *can* practicably do, we will endeavour to do so.

We have striven to keep in touch and maintain regular, *helpful* contact with students and families, to let you know that we are here to support you all as best as we can, and to keep you up to date, providing clarifications, guidance and advice. We have established protocols that we follow rigorously, with care and commitment, to ensure that our students are supported according to need, so in addition to our tutors maintaining contact with students, for example, we have ensured that the 38 students who identified themselves through our first 'keeping in touch' survey as 'struggling' or 'struggling a lot' with the situation we are facing, have been contacted and talked to, along with their families, to offer support and advice and agree actions.

We continue to ensure, thanks to the efforts of many in the College and in the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust central team, that the families of our children eligible for free school meals are provided with hampers of good quality, locally sourced food, and have thus ensured that our families have not had to face the problems many have encountered with the national voucher scheme.

We quickly managed to secure, prepare and distribute some 50 laptops for loan to families in most need of such — along with devices to secure internet access where needed — well before and beyond the necessarily limited scope of the Government's recently announced initiative. And we are doing our best to extend our support in this regard, including to those families whose children are having to share laptops or desktops, sometimes not just amongst themselves but also with parents and carers who need to work from home — which we know may obviously cause additional anxieties for many families at a time when there is plenty else to worry about.

You may have heard this morning, for example, one of our parent governors speaking on 'Breakfast on BBC Radio Devon,' launching a fundraising campaign for 'laptops and dongles' on our behalf and that of all schools in the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust (if you missed it, you can listen again on BBC Sounds; the segment runs from 07:39). You can find more about the campaign here, where you will also be able to donate if you can and wish to: <https://donatemy school.com/dartmoormultiacademytrust2173>.

We are already considering ways in which we can make up for the time our students have missed from school, and support our efforts in the future, when schools reopen, to undermine the longer-term detrimental impact on our students' achievement that this period of coronavirus school closures has the potential to have. In the meantime, however, it is important that we continue to help, encourage and support our students to keep focused on their learning, promoting a consistent day-to-day structure and routine, and ensuring that they continue to be provided with meaningful and hopefully manageable learning activities aligned to their curricula at home.

Keeping in Touch Survey 2

Thank you very much again to everyone who was able to complete our 'Keeping in Touch' survey last month. I wrote to you on 14 April summarizing the feedback from this survey and outlining the actions we were taking and the adaptations to our approach we were making in response. May I again emphasise here how helpful the feedback from parents, carers and students through these surveys has been. We want to make sure we understand the issues you and your child(ren) are experiencing and that we know about how you and your children are. We want to make sure that we know about how the remote learning is going at home, and about what we can do differently, or, quite simply, better. We want to ensure that we keep monitoring and evaluating our support, to ensure that the remote learning activities we are providing for our students to engage with remain both meaningful and manageable.

To this end, I invite you and your child(ren) to complete a second 'keeping in touch' survey. This will help us ascertain your satisfaction with the support we are trying to provide, identify any continuing or unresolved issues that you or your child(ren) may be having, and evaluate where we may be able to make further improvements in a spirit of support for as long as this period of temporary school closures continues. I would be very grateful, therefore, if you could complete the survey (one for each of your children) and ask your child(ren) to complete their survey before 23:59 Monday 4 May, when the survey will close. Please use the links below or those provided in the accompanying email. The surveys should only take around 5 minutes to complete. Please note that we will continue to repeat the surveys over the coming weeks, to allow us to monitor any new issues should they arise given the situation.

- Keeping in Touch Survey: Parents and Carers
<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=kG0HO7J4vUqeBclPjiicRjnwSebDr4NDqtvBush-3nFUOEdNWFpCUIUzSldCODFRUkNDRE9YODA5Ui4u>
- Keeping in Touch Survey: Students
<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=kG0HO7J4vUqeBclPjiicRjnwSebDr4NDqtvBush-3nFUNUJBVExHVzRGUVhSRORTT1NNVTZIROVFW54u>

I thank you again, for your support. And again, if you have any concerns that you feel we may be able to help with, please do not hesitate to contact us.

As always, keep looking after yourselves, and each other. Stay safe. Stay home.

Yours sincerely



Derrick Brett
Principal

Links to current advice

(Please do check these pages regularly as they are updated constantly.)

- HM Government main coronavirus page
www.gov.uk/coronavirus
- Okehampton College COVID-19 Latest Updates and Home Learning
www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/covid-19-updates.html
- NHS Health information and advice
www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/
- Full guidance on staying at home and away from others (social distancing)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/full-guidance-on-staying-at-home-and-away-from-others
- Guidance on social distancing for everyone in the UK and protecting older people and vulnerable people at increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people
- Guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable to coronavirus (COVID-19)
www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19
- Stay at home guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection
www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance
- Information for parents and carers about the closure of schools
www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers
- Free School Meals Guidance
www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance
- Guidance for schools about temporarily closing
www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing
- Maintaining Educational Provision (including 'Critical Worker' lists and principles).
www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision
- Guidance on vulnerable children and young people
www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-vulnerable-children-and-young-people
- Guidance for educational settings on COVID-19
www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19
- Guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of coronavirus
www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing
- Guidance on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing>
- Information on the cancellation of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020
www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcse-as-and-a-levels-in-2020
- Information for schools, students and parents on how GCSE, AS, A level, vocational and technical qualifications will be graded and awarded in summer 2020
www.gov.uk/government/publications/awarding-qualifications-in-summer-2020
- Online educational resources for schools and parents to help children to learn at home.
www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-online-education-resources
- Digital innovations tested to support vulnerable people during COVID-19 outbreak
www.gov.uk/government/news/digital-innovations-tested-to-support-vulnerable-people-during-covid-19-outbreak