

Friday 15 May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope and trust you are safe, well and are managing to keep in good spirits.

I write to provide you with some feedback from our second 'keeping in touch' survey, but firstly, to offer you some clarity further to the Prime Minister's announcement on 10 May about HM Government's 'ambition... that secondary pupils facing exams next year will get at least some time with their teachers before the [summer] holidays'. This broad statement has been added to by guidance published by the Department for Education which states that *from* the week commencing 1 June HM Government 'are asking... secondary schools... to begin some face to face support with year 10 and 12 pupils.'

In the service of clarity, therefore:

1. We will continue to remain open to vulnerable children and children of critical workers and we will continue to provide remote learning opportunities and activities for students across all year groups (I provide an update on our work in this area later in this letter). Students in Y7-9 will not have an opportunity to return to school for any form of provision for the remainder of this academic year, unless, of course, they are vulnerable or have parents who are critical workers.
2. Regarding the 'ambition' for schools to offer 'some face to face support with year 10 and 12 pupils' from 1 June, please understand that does not mean that Y10 and Y12 students will return in full to their normal timetables from 1 June. As such, please do not make any plans under such an assumption. It must be emphasised that this is an 'ambition,' an ambition moreover that is subject to scientific evidence about the spread of the coronavirus, dependent upon the government's five tests being met, including a reduction in the infection rate nationally, and is therefore subject to change.

Furthermore, assuming that the 'ambition' remains *from* 1 June, the DfE guidance categorically states that '[t]his will not be a return to full timetables or pupils back in school or college full time, rather [it means] some support to supplement pupils' remote education.' The key here is that 'some face to face contact' is to *supplement* pupils' remote education, i.e. remote education is still seen for the remainder of the academic year as the 'main' form of provision. In addition, please note, as the guidance continues, '[i]n line with implementing protective measures and reducing contacts, schools... should limit the attendance of the year 10 and 12 cohort in the setting at any one time.'

Throughout this period of school closure, I have endeavoured to keep you as up to date as possible with developments and our actions. And in this spirit, whilst I wish I would be able to provide you with a full plan now for our actions in respect to Y10 and Y12, I hope you will understand that we are simply not yet in a position to do so. Indeed, it would be irresponsible of me to suggest otherwise.

We are working with our colleagues in the Dartmoor Multi Academy Trust, consulting with the local authority and the various Unions supporting our staff, and will, of course, communicate our plans to you once we have had the opportunity to work through them in detail and address the many issues that confront us. As I have no doubt you will appreciate, there are a considerable range of quite complex, logistical issues we must — and have begun to — address before we can proceed with any plan to offer ‘some face to face support’ with our Y10 and Y12 students. We must balance our professional desire to welcome our students back to school, in whatever form such provision will take, with the priority to ensure that social distancing measures will be maintained. We must be able to reassure you that your child(ren) will be safe should they attend school. As DfE guidance stipulates, we are undertaking a risk assessment before opening to more students that ‘directly address[es] risks associated with coronavirus so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for [our students] and staff.’ I can assure this exercise is being undertaken with due diligence, care, and, to emphasise, with the health and safety of our school community paramount. I want to reassure you that we will proceed, with caution, with finalise any plans to offer ‘some face to face support’ for our Y10 and Y12 students *when* we are satisfied that the measures we are able to put in place will protect your children and our staff.

To this end, we are taking steps now to identify members of our community who are classed as either ‘clinically extremely vulnerable’ or ‘clinically vulnerable’. We will be sending a link to a brief survey for all parents of Y10 and Y12 students to complete so that we may gather this information and ensure that we have identified all students who either fall in these categories themselves, or live in a household with someone who does. Further details about why this is necessary are provided in the surveys and through accompanying links (please also see those at the end of this letter).

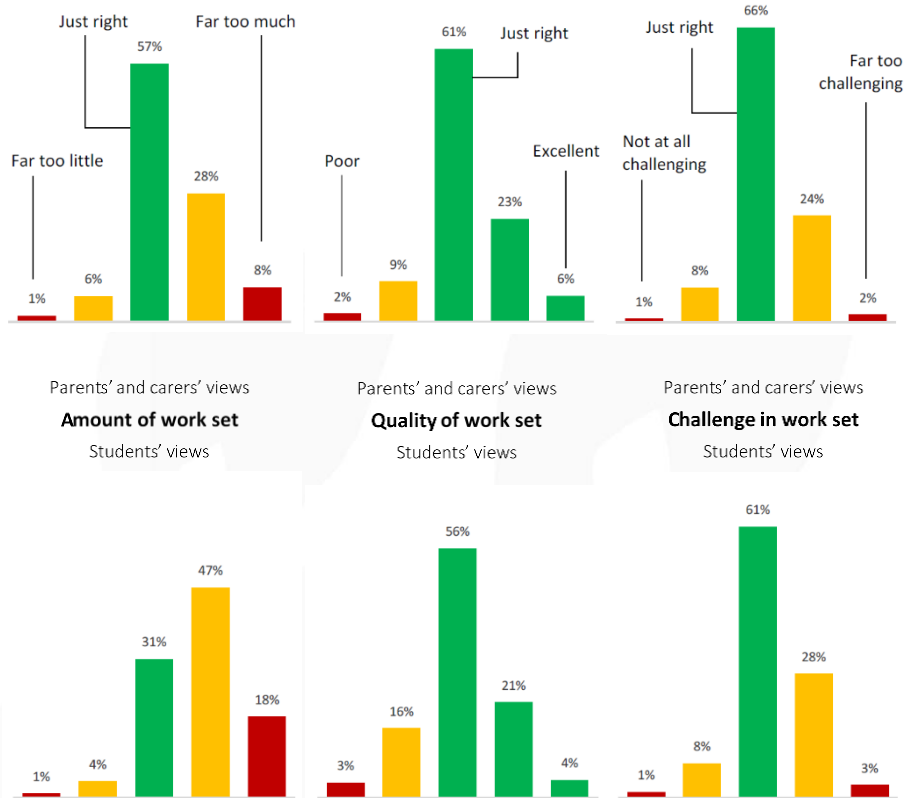
Feedback from our second ‘Keeping in Touch’ surveys

May I thank everyone who was able to complete our second ‘keeping in touch’ survey. We received responses to the surveys from 529 parents and carers and 328 students and can promise you again that we have looked at — and taken note of — every response.

We are pleased that the vast majority of our families remain satisfied with the support we are providing remotely, but, of course, we want to do whatever we can to make sure that the remote learning opportunities we are providing for our students continue to be as meaningful and manageable as possible. I outline below for your information a summary of the feedback from parents and carers, and the feedback from our students, along with some clarifications and outlines of the actions we are taking in response. We intend on reissuing the survey again in the next few weeks to check that our responses to your feedback are having the desired effect.

I outline overleaf for your information the feedback from the survey, in summary:

Figure illustrating the summary views of parents and carers, and students about the amount of work, and the quality and challenge of work set during the first four weeks of 'remote learning,' 23 March to 6 May 2020.



(1) Parents and carers reported on average an overall score of satisfaction with the support the college is providing of 4 (where 1 is 'not at all satisfied' and 5 is 'very satisfied'). One parent in every three reported being 'very satisfied,' while 3 parents (less than 1%) reported being 'not at all satisfied.'

(2) Most of our students are 'coping' with these extraordinarily challenging circumstances, as indicated by 86% of parents and carers and 79% of students themselves.

⇒ Under the coordination of our safeguarding team, however, we are ensuring that we contact the 68 students who were identified by parents and carers, or who otherwise identified themselves through their surveys, as 'struggling' or 'struggling a lot'. In addition, Tutors will continue to make regular weekly 'checking in' contact with all students in their tutor groups (may I please remind parents and carers, in this regard, that this communication is typically taking place once a week initially by email.)

⇒ I also direct parents and carers to the page we have set up on our website providing a range of advice and activities to support children's mental health and wellbeing:

www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/parentsandcoronavirus.html

- ⇒ May I also remind parents and carers of the information I provided in my letter of 1 April about looking after our own and our children's mental health and wellbeing, particularly the support you and your child can access through www.kooth.com and Place2Be: www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/uploads/6/1/4/4/61443371/okecoll_010420.pdf
- ⇒ I urge you to not hesitate for one second in contacting us should you have any concerns, or wish to discuss anything with us, or, indeed, should you wish simply to talk.
- (3) Whilst most parents (57%) continue to think that the amount of work set by teachers for their children is 'just right,' most students think there is 'too much'.
- (4) Satisfaction with the way in which the work is being set remains high (and improving) for parents and carers (81%), and students at (72%). There has been a notable improvement particularly in the satisfaction of parents and carers of Y7 and Y8 students. Where there is dissatisfaction, the capacity of children to manage their own workload and self-direct their own learning remains a concern for some, but there were also several references made to issues of access due to technical problems, such as competition for devices within the family, format of files, poor internet, issues with links, etc.
- (5) The overwhelming majority of parents (89%) and students (81%) continue to regard the quality of work set to be 'just right' or better.
- (6) Most parents (2 in every 3) and students continue to think that the challenge of work set for their children is 'just right,' with notable improvements in the perceptions of parents of Y7 and Y8 students, and the students themselves.
- (7) 1 in 5 parents (and students) report that logistical/practical issues are affecting children's ability to complete work. This is a significant improvement from our first 'keeping in touch' survey, where 1 in 3 faced such issues. Many of these issues now center around competition within families for access to devices, alongside poor internet connections. To date we have distributed some 60 devices for loan, including the provision of internet access, and our IT team are busily readying more devices for loan. Furthermore, as I wrote in my letter of 1 May, a fundraising campaign for 'laptops and dongles' has been launched on our behalf by one of our parent governors (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>.)

Supporting Remote Learning

Firstly, let me make it clear that we believe it is our duty to provide our students with effective remote learning opportunities, and aim to do so with sensitivity, flexibility, and reasonableness. We want students to be motivated — and able — to engage with the learning opportunities we provide remotely and are committed to ensuring equitable access to technology. We understand that learning remotely at home cannot replicate the experience and interaction that takes place in the classroom, and that it would be unrealistic of us to expect students' engagement with their learning remotely to be the same without the reassurance and routine of the school day. We are sensitive to the fact that families will be in different places, for many different reasons, in terms of how they can support their children to learn at home, and

we will do what we can to negate the effects these relative differences have the potential to have. We aim for the learning we provide for students remotely to be manageable and meaningful, and to provide activities in a way that helps students and parents manage workload and retain *some* semblance of structure, habit, and rhythm that will support students eventual return to school.

We have used your feedback, alongside emerging evidence about how best to support students to learn remotely, to refine our approach, as I outline in the 8 points below, and which we have clarified with all staff.

- (1) Teachers will provide 'lessons,' i.e. learning activities and opportunities for students to undertake at home, according to students' scheduled timetable.
 - For example, if a teacher teaches a Y8 Geography class on both Tuesday and Thursday, that teacher will upload one 'lesson' to Class Charts for all students in that class on Tuesday (the issue date will be Tuesday and the due date will be Tuesday), and one 'lesson' for Thursday (the issue date will be Thursday and the due date will be Thursday).
 - Teachers should not set open ended projects that demand students to regulate the time they give to them.
 - Teachers should not, as a rule, and certainly not routinely, provide learning activities or opportunities for students to undertake outside of or in addition to timetabled lesson days, including at weekends. If teachers wish to do so, such activities should only be offered as a suggestion, and clearly labelled as such.
- (2) Teachers will ensure that each Class Charts lesson will have the standard heading:
Day • Date dd/mm/yyyy • Subject (e.g. Friday • 15/05/2020 • Mathematics).
- (3) Teachers will set lessons only on Class Charts.
 - If other online platforms or sources are to be used for that lesson, e.g. MS Teams for 'live' discussion, mathswatch for online activity, etc., they are to be linked to on that lesson's Class Charts page.
- (4) Teachers will plan for lessons to last no more than 40-45 minutes.
- (5) Teachers will provide concise advice and information to guide students through each 'lesson'. As such, teachers will ensure that the following elements are evident in 'lessons':
 - Explanation / modelling.
 - ⇒ If not done 'live' this could be through a video, written text, etc.
 - ⇒ Ensure explanation builds clearly on students' prior learning or on how students' understanding could be subsequently assessed.
 - ⇒ Give explanations *before* exercises.

- Independent activity.
 - ⇒ Progressive, scaffolded cognitive demand.
 - ⇒ Prompt students to consider the strategies they will use if stuck.
 - Opportunity to reflect and check.
 - ⇒ Provide proxies for feedback such as model answers, solutions.
 - ⇒ Prompt students with questions to reflect on their work or to consider the strategies they attempted when stuck.
- (6) Teachers should routinely set an activity for students in Y7-10 and Y12 that requires submission.
- For subjects that have more than one lesson a week, such an activity should be set once every two weeks. For other subjects, such an activity should be set once every four weeks.
 - This piece of work will be done during the 'lesson' time, i.e. it will not have a submission date outside of the date of the lesson.
 - This serves two functions, namely validation and feedback, i.e. to recognize students' efforts and encourage further working by validating and acknowledging completed work.
- (7) Teachers will acknowledge when students submit work with a note on Class Charts.
- (8) Teachers will hold 'contact' sessions with their classes.
- For subjects that have more than one lesson a week, one 'contact' session should take place every two weeks. For other subjects, one 'contact' session should take place every four weeks.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read it; I hope you will forgive me its length. I also thank you again, sincerely, for your continued 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. I will, of course, continue to communicate with you as and when we have pertinent information to share. If you are a parent or carer of a Y10 or Y12 student, please do not forget to complete the survey that will follow.

As always, keep looking after yourselves, and each other.

Yours sincerely



Derrick Brett
Principal

Select Links to current advice

(Links to advice and guidance with specific reference to information included in this letter.)

- Cabinet Office. (2020, May 11). Staying alert and safe (social distancing). Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>
- Department for Education. (2020a, May 10). What parents and carers need to know about schools, colleges and other education settings during the coronavirus outbreak. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>
- Department for Education. (2020b, May 12). Actions for educational and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020>
- Department for Education. (2020c, May 12). Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>
- Department for Education. (2020d, May 14). Opening schools for more children and young people: initial planning framework for schools in England. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-educational-and-childcare-settings-to-prepare-for-wider-opening-from-1-june-2020/opening-schools-for-more-children-and-young-people-initial-planning-framework-for-schools-in-england>
- Prime Minister's Office. (2020, May 10). PM address to the nation on coronavirus: 10 May 2020. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-address-to-the-nation-on-coronavirus-10-may-2020>
- Public Health England. (2020, May 5). COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable. Retrieved from <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>