

Monday 27 April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope you and your children are well. I write, as we begin our fourth week away from school, to provide you with some updates and information and, simply, to remind you that we are thinking of you, and that we are here — to support, advise, guide or just listen. 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. Whilst we continue to look forward to the day when we will be able to welcome our students back, we remain open for vulnerable children and the children of critical workers, one of the 61% of all educational establishments nationwide doing so, according to data published last week by HM Government.

Supporting Remote Learning at Home

We are continuing to do whatever we can, given the circumstances, to lessen the impact of our closure on our students' learning. We are endeavouring to ensure that all students are provided with appropriate learning activities to complete remotely, and, moreover, that all students can access such. I do hope as well that the actions we have taken, and the adaptations we have made in response to the feedback provided by parents, carers and students through our 'keeping in touch' survey, have helped to ensure that the remote learning activities students are engaging with remain both meaningful and manageable.

As ever, we are always looking to do things as well as we can, putting the interests of our students first, and very much welcome your feedback in this regard. To this end, we will be distributing a second 'keeping in touch' survey later this week to you and your child(ren) — to ascertain your satisfaction 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.

Two reports published last week — by the Education Endowment Foundation about remote learning, and by the Sutton Trust about the impact of school shutdowns — both reinforced the relative value of online learning at home for children during these extraordinary times. We have ensured, of course, that our students receive work online (via 'Class Charts' with links to other platforms for some learning activities), as some '60% of private schools and 37% of state schools in the most affluent areas' have also done, according to the Sutton Trust. Similarly, whilst we have provided — as quickly as we have been practicably able to — nearly 50 laptops and, in several cases, internet connections to help ensure that *all* of our students are able to access learning online, for comparison around 1 in 5 schools nationally are estimated by the Sutton Trust to have done the same. Alongside this, through our monitoring, we are endeavouring to work with, advise and support the 5% of our families and students who are still struggling to engage with the remote learning opportunities we are doing our best to provide.

HM Government recently published a list of free online educational resources to help children learn at home, and I provide a link to this list for your convenience at the end of this letter. Many of the resources listed, however, we already included in our document 'Online Resources to support Home Learning' that we initially shared with families via email on 21 March 2020 and have subsequently

updated and uploaded to our website homepage. In addition, as you may have seen in the media, the Oak National Academy 'online classroom' www.thenational.academy launched last week, providing weekly video lessons across a broad range of subjects for every year group from Reception through to Y10, and the BBC also launched last week its own home education support package across TV and online www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize, providing lessons each day for primary, secondary and post-16 students.

May I please reinforce, however, that these excellent resources have been created, collated and provided for and to you as *additional* opportunities for learning at home. The remote learning activities we are providing, are to encourage, our students to retain a focus on their learning; retain some semblance of structure, habit, and rhythm that will support them. These *additional* resources may be used by teachers as part of the activities they set, or they may be used by you to complement rather than replace the learning activities being provided by teachers.

Whilst, as I hope you know, your child's tutors and teachers are always available to be contacted, and whilst we are endeavouring to maintain regular contact with all our children during this time, I would like to bring to your attention 'StarLine,' a new national home learning helpline that was launched last week. The 'StarLine' service aims to offer confidential home learning advice to families direct from qualified teachers, and parenting and education experts, including advice about behaviour and timetabling as well as help and advice for those looking after children with special educational needs. You can access their advice via www.starline.org.uk or by calling 0330 313 9162.

GCSE, AS and A-Level grades, and Vocational and Technical qualifications summer 2020

As you know, students due to sit A level, AS or GCSE examinations this summer, or complete vocational qualifications (such as Cambridge Nationals and BTecs), will instead be awarded a grade calculated by the exam board for each of their subjects, which is based on an assessment of the grade they would have been most likely to achieve had exams gone ahead. I want to reassure you, again, that we are approaching this process with rigour and integrity to ensure that the centre assessed grades and rank orders we submit to exam boards are an objective and fair reflection of what we would have expected students to achieve based on the evidence we have. If your son or daughter is affected, they may find this short video of explanation from Ofqual useful: youtu.be/VXuDOrtJY1Q.

Further to my letter of 17 April, may I also remind you that Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator, is consulting to seek the views of 'everyone with an interest' about the 'exceptional arrangements' introduced for awarding GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2020, and that this consultation closes at 11:45pm this week on Wednesday 29 April 2020. We have responded to the consultation as a College, and should you wish to do so, the proposals and information about ways to respond can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020

Ofqual have also opened a consultation on the assessment and grading of vocational, technical and other general qualifications for this summer. Should you wish to respond to this consultation, which closes at 11:45pm on 8 May 2020, the proposals and information about ways to respond can be found here: www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-assessment-and-grading-in-2020

Mental Health and Wellbeing

We are doing whatever we can to ensure that our students are supported through these uncertain and anxious times. We have protocols in place that we follow rigorously, with care and commitment, to ensure that our students are supported according to need.

I emphasised in my letter of 1 April the importance of taking the time to ensure that we are looking after our own mental health and that of our loved ones, as we all continue to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 by ensuring that we comply with the measures introduced on 23 March by HM Government to stay at home and away from others. I would like to reaffirm this here, and remind you that we have collated on our website a range of resources and avenues for support to help parents and carers talk to their children about coronavirus www.okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk/parentsandcoronavirus.html.

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that HM Government last week updated their guidance for parents and carers on supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and I provide the link to this useful page for your convenience in the collection of links at the end of this letter. In addition, the Department of Health and Social Care have recently announced a range of digital innovations tested to support vulnerable people during the COVID-19 outbreak, including young people, which I again have added to the collection of links at the end of this letter. I would like to bring to your particular attention here, however, to neurolove.org, a platform providing 'a friendly ear and human support for young people to help them to keep virtually social and safe online [and supporting them] to manage anxiety and low mood.' The platform allows young people to 'book sessions directly with mentors and therapists and find content that will support them to manage their emotional and mental health.'

Okehampton Food Bank

May I end this letter by bringing to your attention the efforts of Okehampton Foodbank to raise funds in support of their work during the coronavirus 'lockdown.' They are dealing with an ever increasing need and are attempting to raise £5000 to help cover the cost of food and the delivery of it to those in our community who are self-isolating. If you can support them with a donation, you can access their JustGiving™ page here: www.justgiving.com/crowdfunding/okefoodbank2020 Thank you.

I thank you again, 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.

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