

Tuesday 14 April 2020

Dear Parents / Carers

I hope you remain well and safe and have enjoyed a restful Easter. Today, of course, should have seen us welcoming our students back for the first day of the summer term. I write to you, therefore, to remind you that teachers are again setting learning activities and work for students to do remotely. I also write to share with you the feedback we received from our 'keeping in touch' surveys, and to provide a little clarification for our Y11 and Y13 students and families.

We are doing our best to be realistic and sensitive to the situation we are all living through, to your needs and your children's, to the fact that the normal curriculum cannot be followed in the usual way in these exceptional circumstances. Please let me reassure you that we absolutely do not expect you as parents and carers to 'home-school' your children. Remote learning simply cannot and will not replicate the experience and interaction that takes place in the classroom. It would be unrealistic of us to suggest otherwise, and as equally unrealistic of us to expect students' engagement with their learning to be the same without the reassurance and routine of the school day.

In providing our students with activities and work to carry out at home during this period of temporary school closure, we are trying to encourage and help them to keep a focus on their learning; to retain some semblance of structure, habit, and rhythm that will support their eventual return to school. We absolutely do not want to add to the stresses that are undoubtedly already felt by families, and do not want to overload you, our students, or, indeed, our teachers, who are feeling these stresses too.

We are also sensitive to the fact that families will be in different places for many different reasons in terms of how they can support their children with any 'remote learning', not only in terms of how well they are able to help children self-organize at home against competing work and family commitments, but also in terms of the issues with access to the learning activities and work set, the capacity and ability to support students with actual content, etc. We are doing everything we can to negate the effects these relative differences may have the potential to have the longer schools remain closed.

We are very much aware of the uncertainty faced by our Y11 and Y13 students and have begun our work on their 'centre assessed grades' that we have to submit to exam boards for them to receive their calculated grades. We are also thinking of our Y10 and Y12 students, whose GCSE and A-Level courses have been profoundly disrupted, and who are losing curriculum time to cover the necessary content with their teachers. We are thinking of our Y9 students, whose process of making their KS4 options has been interrupted. We are thinking of our Y7 and Y8 students, who have had their starts to secondary schooling hampered. But the important thing to remember is that we are all — students, families and schools — across the country, facing the same challenges. The feedback you are providing us, such as that from our 'keeping in touch' survey, is invaluable in our efforts to ensure that we address these challenges effectively.

Feedback from 'Keeping in Touch' surveys

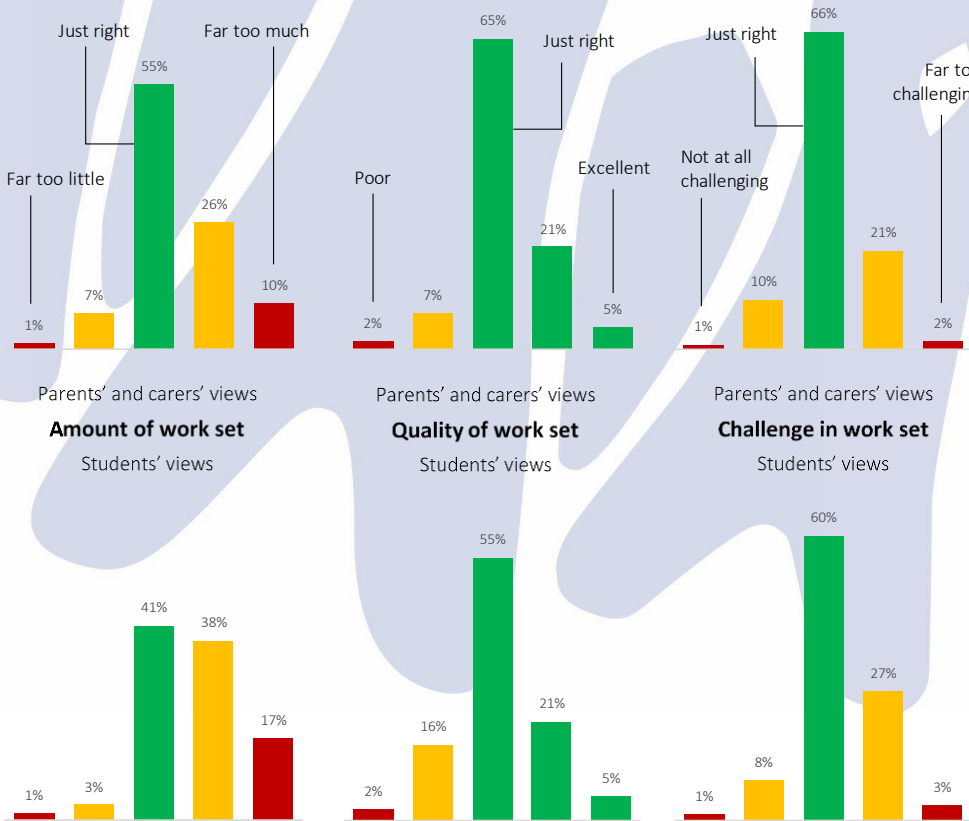
May I thank everyone who was able to complete the 'keeping in touch' survey we sent out recently. The information the surveys have provided has informed our evaluation of the first week of remote learning for our students and helped us refine our approach to this provision. I also want to thank you very much for the many positive messages, which we of course welcome and greatly appreciate.

We received responses to the surveys from 416 parents and carers and 287 students and can promise you that we have looked at — and taken note of — every response. I outline below 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 after the first two weeks of the summer term to check that our responses to your feedback and actions are having the desired effect.

The vast majority of our students are coping with these extraordinarily challenging circumstances, as indicated by 85% of parents and carers and 84% of students themselves. Under the coordination of our safeguarding team, however, we are ensuring that we contact the 38 students who identified themselves through their surveys as ‘struggling’ or ‘struggling a lot’. Whilst Tutors will also be checking in with their students in the coming weeks, may 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. In addition, please remember 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 invaluable 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. Should you have any concerns, or wish to discuss anything with us, or, indeed, should you wish simply to talk, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Most parents think that the amount of work set by teachers for their children is ‘just right,’ and the vast majority are satisfied with how we are setting the work. Parents and carers and students are overwhelmingly happy with the quality of work set, with most thinking that the challenge of work set is ‘just right’. Whilst we are of course happy about this — especially when compared with the recent national poll of parents commissioned by the Sutton Trust that found that less than half reported being satisfied with the learning support provided by schools for children now at home — we have real empathy with those parents and carers and students who are, to varying degrees, and for varying reasons, struggling with learning remotely. And, moreover, we feel that we can use their experiences to refine our approach for the benefit of all families.

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 week of ‘remote learning,’ 23-27 March 2020.



Of the parents and carers and students who were not satisfied with the amount of work being set, during the first week of remote learning, most stated that they felt there was too much work, and most of these parents and carers were of our students in Y7 and Y8. Notably, there was also clear relationship for these parents and carers and students between the amount of work and how it was being set. The underlying reasons for this and, indeed, for the relatively

small amount of dissatisfaction with the quality of work or its degree of challenge, clearly lie around the capacity of children to manage their own workload and self-direct their own learning remotely. And again, we have absolute empathy with this, and as a result, we aim to refine our approach to the provision of 'remote learning' for the benefit of everyone in the following ways:

- We will ensure that Class Charts is used as the sole communication with students and families about work. Links to other platforms required to complete work, and any other resources, will be provided on the respective Class Charts communication. This will ensure that everything a student needs to complete the work set is found in one place, which will thus allow parents and carers to monitor what work is set and help their children to 'self-direct' without stress.
- We will set work in a way that supports students and parents, particularly our younger students in Y7 and Y8, manage workload and retain some sense and rhythm of routine and structure, i.e.:
 - Work, advice and instructions will be given for students for each lesson in each of their timetabled subjects and will only appear to students on Class Charts on the day their lessons are timetabled — to avoid students being overwhelmed. This means that parents and carers and students will only have to navigate their way through five Class Chart communications each day.
 - The information given on Class Charts from teachers will make clear what students should *aim* to do in each 'lesson'. If a body of work has been set in advance in some subjects, each Class Chart communication will make it clear what students should *aim* to do from this body of work by the end of each 'lesson'. This will help students manage their workload (and parents and carers to support them in doing so) and resist the temptation to do too much, or otherwise avoid doing too much for lack of knowing what is expected. If a lesson lasts for an hour and students find that they have not completed the activities by the time the hour is up, they should stop.
- Whilst we will continue to promote the flexibility for parents and carers and students to choose what order to complete the work during the day, in order to make students' return to school in the future as smooth as it possibly can be in the circumstances, we would advise to keep everything as normal as possible and follow a structure at home that mirrors the structure of their learning at school. It is also important that students have breaks, follow timings and again, avoid the temptation to 'overwork'.
- Interactions between students and teachers will only take place via email or through MS Teams; Class Charts will not be used for such communication.

Whilst most parents and carers and students indicate that they are not facing any logistical or practical issues that are affecting students' ability to complete the work being set, some indicate that they are. The issues shared concern juggling work and family commitments during an already stressful time; students being expected to learn to use new technology/software; sharing computer use across the family; issues with accessing sites (not being able to log in to sites, poor internet connection, limited or non-existent access to computers/laptops); too much work being set in one go for children to navigate their way through without stress, confusing expectations and making workload feel overwhelming; inability to help their children, etc.

- May I remind you that we have set up a dedicated email for students and parents and carers to use should they need any support logging into the various websites and platforms subjects use to support learning, e.g. vle.mathswatch.co.uk, www.senecalearning.com, sparx.co.uk/maths, etc. We will be able to support and troubleshoot any issues you may have accessing respective sites if you contact a member of our IT team via datacheck@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk
- We have already distributed over 30 laptops to families and are finalising arrangements to provide support to other families regarding internet provision, but I would urge you again to please contact us (admin@okehamptoncollege.devon.sch.uk) if you require any help in this regard, and whilst we cannot make any promises, we will endeavour to do whatever we can to overcome the constraints we face to support you. Similarly, if you are struggling with the provision of materials for your child such as pencils, paper, etc.

GCSE, AS and A-Level grades summer 2020

Further to my letter of 3 April — where I explained the detail published by Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator, of how GCSEs, AS and A Levels will be awarded for students this summer — I would like to take this opportunity to ensure clarity for our Y11 and Y13 students, and their parents and carers, around completing work at home.

In my letter of 3 April, I emphasised that ‘there is no requirement for schools to set additional mock exams or homework tasks for the purposes of determining centre assessment grades, and no student will be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete any work set after schools were closed.’ This is further to my letter of 24 March, where I stated the reasons for us continuing to set learning activities and work for Y11 and Y13 students, namely: ‘given... that your child may decide to sit exams in the future depending on the ‘calculated’ grades they receive, we advise students who were due to sit examinations this summer to continue their preparations and continue to work at home. Teachers will continue to provide education for students in Y11 and Y13 remotely during this period of temporary school closures’. We are also mindful of the fact that our Y11 and Y13 students may be out of school for a prolonged period and do not want them entering the next phase of their education unprepared, or out of rhythm.

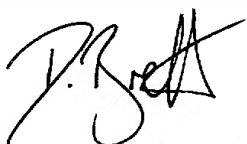
For the avoidance of doubt, I want to make it clear that the work teachers of Y11 and Y13 will continue to set after the Easter ‘break’ is voluntary. This work is entirely intended to support students to continue their studies in case they are not happy with the calculated grades they receive and choose to sit the exams when they are intended to be made available in the coming autumn. Any such work **will not**, be used by teachers as part of the evidence base informing judgements about the ‘centre assessed grades’ and ‘rank orders’ we will submit to exam boards.

Ofqual state, that ‘where additional work has been completed after schools and colleges were closed on 20 March, Heads of Centre should exercise caution where that evidence suggests a change in performance. In many cases this is likely to reflect the circumstances and context in which the work is done.’ To this end, I can assure you that in order to ensure objectivity and fairness for all our students when arriving at judgements about ‘centre assessed grades’ and ‘rank orders’, teachers will only be using the evidence we have up to the date where schools and colleges were closed, i.e. 20 March 2020. We **will not** be considering work completed after schools and colleges were closed, i.e. 20 March, as evidence when arriving at judgements on students’ ‘centre assessed grades’ and ‘rank orders.’

The situation continues to change at a pace, with huge amounts of information being released on a regular basis. One reason that we are endeavouring to keep in regular communication with you is to hopefully ensure that you are aware of the important points of information, and that you have access to all detail HM Government provides should you want to consider it. We will of course continue to keep you updated and continue to give you opportunities to provide us with feedback.

As always, stay safe, stay at home, and look after each other.

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-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-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-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
- 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 GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications will be graded and awarded in summer 2020.
www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-as-and-a-level-awarding-summer-2020