



15 May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to offer further detail on how we will work towards the stated ambition of the government that from 1 June secondary schools will be able “*to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of Year 10 and Year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year*” in addition to the provision for the children of key workers which we have been doing since 20 March alongside the home learning provision available to all.

I hope it is understood that we categorically would like nothing more than our vibrant, purposeful and happy school back together focused on our core purpose. However, as I stated in my email on 12 May, it is important that we work in the time we have, to consider the options available to us in our setting before rushing to a decision that otherwise may be flawed. Heathfield has characteristics that are unique to us, for example we are not an urban school and our rurality brings complexity of access. The students described as sitting exams next year would also include Year 9. Our site has both advantages and disadvantages relevant to the requirements for social distancing. We aim to make decisions that are, to use the government's language; informed by facts, fair and proportionate. It has to be sustainable for *all* groups for whom we are responsible to receive educational provision of the highest standard possible. In other words, we cannot sacrifice provision for one group in order to enhance that of another.

To that end we have written our own set of “five conditions” carefully matched to government guidance which cover the requirements that would have to be in place before we can start to open more widely and in time expand further. These broad headings have many detailed plans, checks and risk assessments sitting behind them:

1) Hygiene, health and safety of the College site

We have to be assured that the condition of the site, the adequate provision of sanitising equipment, any PPE required and ongoing practices to maintain hygiene standards have been risk assessed and adapted. This will cover a wide range of areas from the school site infrastructure, classroom equipment, use of shared spaces and changes to daily routines to take account of social distancing, among many other aspects.



2) Movement in and around the College building.

Some areas of the school site will need physical adjustment, other areas will require changes to use and practice; direction of travel around the site will need to be managed differently, social time spaces and required behaviours need to be planned.

3) Transport/commuting to and from College.

We are unlikely to be able to provide the flexible pattern to days being described in some areas, much of our ability to design provision will depend on the transportation available and the assurances we receive on the hygiene and social distancing standards being upheld. We may have to make adjustments to our site based on pupil travel preferences.

4) Staffing capacity

On 20 March when schools closed to most, over 19 staff were shielding due to either their own health or that of others in their household. Unless shielding advice changes that capacity will not change. We also need to ensure that we have adequately provided PPE for those whose role requires it, following the risk assessments taking place. Staff will require training to be able to understand and uphold the changes to practice on site so that their supervision is safe. In some areas, we will need to ensure we have additional staffing to cover the needs of the new requirements.

5) Pupil population prioritisation/ Teaching and Learning

We will expect to continue to provide for the children of key workers. We will also evaluate the evidence to facilitate a series of phased approaches. We will prioritise the students that we know are struggling most with home learning, those from vulnerable groups and those who are in danger of falling behind. We know that we aim to include Year 9 two year courses in the groups who receive some contact with teachers before they embark on their examination years. We also know we want to ensure the quality of remote teaching and learning remains strong for those year groups not covered by this wider opening arrangement.

As has been the case throughout, the timescales are not generous. As of the announcements on Monday 11 May we will have had only 10 school days until half term in which to effect the required changes. As of 14 May the Department for Education is still issuing updated guidance for us to respond to and we know more is intended next week. I am not prepared to rush the decisions required and endanger someone's health or well-being.

Be assured, we have already started work on the risk assessments, purchasing and planning for the necessary adaptations. Senior staff have begun modelling the options for different provision in different configurations of year groups. With year groups of 240 and a socially distanced capacity per classroom of approximately 8 students, this is a clearly complex matter but we are in detailed planning. Furthermore, I wish to ensure the quality of provision for all, including those remaining in home learning, stays strong. I also need to be honest that face to face support does not mean teaching as normal. As set out in the government guidance *"This will not be a return to full timetables or*

pupils back in school or college full time, rather some support to supplement pupils' remote education".

It is fair to say that *if* the safeguarding provisions are in place, and *if* the national government's 5 tests are reached that enable this next step, we will probably adopt a phased approach. It is highly likely that only a small number of additional students will return to school for some of the time in the first week or two after the start of June. We would then aim to move to wider opening and subject support for all of Year 9, 10 and 12 in some format in a second slightly later stage. At this point, we would consult with those families who may be able to access this extended offer at the point, we would also provide the more detailed guidance on how the offer would be facilitated on site and the changes to practice that could be expected to ensure we are compliant with social distancing, health and safety guidance. Hopefully this will give families the information they need to be able to make choices about what they wish to do.

We are also conscious that in Term 6 we will also wish to provide some transition support to Year 6 students who will be keen to learn more about their new secondary school.

I want to acknowledge at this time that I do understand how difficult this is. I know that for some year groups this news is a bitter disappointment and that for many, whatever we are able to provide will not be enough to satisfy the desire to return to learning, see friends and return to a "normal life". All of this is really hard for all of us.

Whilst we focus our efforts on planning these options, please know that staff continue to work hard to provide the resources and support to enable all students to continue with their learning and make progress that will keep them within reach of their ambitions. The feedback, contact and communication that flows both ways between home and teachers is highly valued by all involved and enables us all to feel purposeful and connected.

In the meantime, I remind you of the simple truths from my previous letter that resound throughout this period:

- *Routines of work help and are good for mental well being*
- *Exercise and/or relaxation strategies are important*
- *Time with family is important but so too is staying in touch with friends online*
- *Communication is vital: keeping it calm, clear and simple so we all understand each other and we try not to let the frustrations of the situation affect our mutual support*

There will be an opportunity to increase some of these activities under the new slightly lifted restrictions which may make a big difference to many who find the isolation of lockdown difficult. As always, please stay in touch with us if you feel that you or your son/daughter are struggling at this time.

It may be useful for you to know that the local Headteachers are in regular contact, we are aware of the provision in each school and the factors behind each variation. We will be aiming for as much consistency as possible across the locality whilst acknowledging that in some cases our circumstances and cohorts are quite different. This will allow us to hold an East Sussex view as opposed to a national comparison. It will not surprise you

to know that our strong advice, as always, is to avoid speculation and rumour in the media and social media particularly.

Please be assured we will work as hard as we can to provide as much as we can as safely as we can, to as many as we can. I personally would like nothing more than to see our students and staff back together doing what they do best. As soon as we are able to be clear with you which students are able to return, on what basis and on which date then we will let you know. I will be as honest and transparent as I am able to be as we navigate these changing circumstances.

In the meantime, thank you for everything so far. Your communication is much appreciated, as is your support. Please keep doing what you are doing; sharing your experiences, creating shared memories and celebrating achievements, it means we will be all the stronger as we come through this together.

I have always been very proud to be the Headteacher of Heathfield Community College and whilst I never imagined it would be in these circumstances, I have never been more proud of our community than now. We are genuinely living the pride, ambition and community that makes us special, that makes us Heathfield. Thank you.

Please accept my very best wishes for you and your family and my gratitude for your ongoing support.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Barlow', written in a cursive style.

MS C BARLOW
Headteacher