

30 March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

I am writing to you as we start our second week of 'lockdown' in these new circumstances. I am sure that we will emerge from this time with some new perspectives and reflections, however for now our energies must be on keeping each other safe and managing the time as best we can. Therefore, I am writing with some updated guidance on the approaches we are taking up until Easter.

Keeping each other safe and well

This has to be our number one priority and so, hard as it is to manage children who are constrained in home spaces, it is what is needed at this time. We are very grateful to you for following the guidance closely.

We are staying in touch with those we know are more vulnerable and may struggle particularly at this time to try and reach out with support as far as we are able. However, we are also aware that even the most resilient may struggle at this time and so school staff may well contact you to reach out. This is simply part of our intent to make sure all of us are still connected.

If you have any concerns about your son/daughter, please contact your HoY/Pastoral Manager in the first instance.

Key worker provision

The college continues to maintain a skeleton provision for students of key workers where it is not possible for them to work at home. We know who our key workers are and will be contacting them on a weekly basis to secure provision for the week ahead. Further details follow for those who have booked each week. However, the clear government guidance is that children are safer at home. We also have to consider the safety of our staff and so we would urge that where home learning can be maintained, this is the first option.

Managing 'Home Learning'

Thank you to all for your patience and support as we navigated the Europe-wide problems with Firefly last week, some teachers moved over to Google Classrooms which also works well, others have continued and Firefly is now continuing to operate well. Where there have been individual technical issues, hopefully we have worked to resolve these remotely too.

Staff and students both experienced the same problems so please be assured we know how frustrating and difficult it was. I am very grateful to our Network Services team whose expertise and hard work has been invaluable.

We believe that the vast majority of our students, due to their ability and work ethic, are far better to stick to a routine of 5 "lessons" a day with an ability to communicate with their class teacher. We use the term "lessons" loosely as we know not as much will be covered as normal.

This will not only continue their learning as far as we are able but will maintain a routine and sense of connection that is vital for well-being.

However, we do all need to be mindful of what is manageable in these times when the students do not have their teacher and peers for support. We are guiding staff to be more flexible in the deadlines and realistic about the quantity of work set so that students feel occupied and engaged but do not become anxious about associated expectations.

As always we will work best at this when we work together. Reminders are only sent when teachers do not hear from a student, often that lack of reply can cause concern for their well-being so it is important students are encouraged to stay in contact with their staff to let them know how they are getting on. Nobody minds if they are slower than usual to complete a piece of work, we just need them to stay in touch.

We are also conscious staff, like you, are balancing their own families and potentially illness at this time too, so it benefits none of us to be in a search for perfection. Positive communication is vital, as is understanding on all sides.

Community

A completely optional part of our connectedness is our Twitter feed @Heathfield_CC where each day we invite students (and often parents) to stay in touch with a chosen theme. If you have not yet engaged, it may well be worth a look. It is a small effort but a way we can all still feel a sense of College culture and community.

We will try to share our usual Tutor Time themes each week and our Words of the Term, please be clear - this is not extra work, it is simply to keep the continuity going and provide new and different topics of conversation at home. It is all completely optional.

Be aware of scam emails

We have been informed that some parents have received an email stating the following:

'As schools will be closing, if you're entitled to free school meals, please send your bank details and we'll make sure you're supported'.

We can confirm that this is a scam email and is not official. We urge parents that if you receive any emails like this, please do not respond, and delete it immediately.

And finally,

Thank you for all you are doing, for your positivity; your care and support of our community is only matched by that of our staff. We are all gutted that we can't be together at this time but we are finding the strength of our virtual community is some comfort at this time.

Let's stay kind and stay positive as we find our way together.

Yours sincerely



MS C BARLOW
Headteacher