

3 July 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

This week we passed the milestone of 100 days of lockdown and we approach a weekend where aspects of society start to re-open. For many this brings both excitement and concern. As far as education more broadly is concerned it has been another busy week in the news. Within this letter I will attempt to share with you our perspective on the headlines and hyperbole and offer clarity on the path Heathfield Community College will take in the coming weeks and months.

Impact of Lockdown

If we are to believe the headlines, the children of our community are likely to suffer irreparable damage to their mental health and have lost years of their educational progress. When reading such pieces, it is important to remember that these headlines are aimed at a wide audience and not specific to Heathfield. Whilst there will of course be some recovery work needed with individuals and small groups due to the impact of 3 months away from teachers and classes, we do not believe we are facing quite the apocalypse that has been predicted by some.

Heathfield students are substantially better placed than many of their peers nationally. Until 23 March they were all active participants in a flourishing school, described by Ofsted as “*thriving at this school. They benefit from an excellent all-round education. Pupils achieve highly in the subjects.*” This has consistently led to outcomes over the last 4-5 years significantly above national averages (Top 10% for GCSE in 2019 and top 20% for A Level). Further to this, we know our curriculum provision is strong which was also validated in March 2020. During lockdown, work set has been meaningful and of a high quality. The vast majority of students have completed most tasks and therefore will be in a strong position to pick up and go forward in September.

Catch-up Provision

Much has been made of the 19 June announcement of investment for catch up provision and a national tutoring programme. It is of course welcome news that there is capacity to support students and we need to be very careful that we use any funding wisely to fit the needs of our students. Currently, we have no information on how much that will be for our school or when it will reach us. The available research points to strategies we already deploy across College with clear impact:

- High quality teaching: seen by Ofsted, supported by our staffing and training models.
- High quality assessment and feedback: assessment throughout tells us where students are now, September will identify gaps and allow us to adjust teaching and extra support.
- One to one and small group tuition: which is already part of our practice in what we call wave 1 and wave 2 intervention both in the classroom, in school time and in after school support with subject specialists who know the children.
- Intervention programmes for literacy and numeracy: run in school time in English and in LS.
- Parental support to encourage reading and attendance.
- Access to technology afforded through our iPad scheme.

Some elements suggested do not work for our setting such as extending the school day which is hard to do equitably for all although possible for some. Others have variable impact, such as summer schools, due to

high levels of personalisation and attendance required to be effective. An attachment to this letter gives more detail about how catch-up may look at Heathfield.

Celebration

We still have much to celebrate about the achievements of our students. Nearly 65% of students will receive P3s next week for their excellent commitment to their home learning and we know that close to 90% still maintain completion of most tasks. Staff have been very impressed with the knowledge retention and engagement of Year 10 in our taught sessions this term, equally in Year 12 face-to-face seminars. We have heard fantastic feedback about the volunteering hours of our Duke of Edinburgh students and we were blown away by the compassion and gratefulness shown by our students last week for Public Service Day.

The End of Term

We still have two and a half full weeks of term to enjoy and there will be much to celebrate by the 22 July. Learning, as it always does, will continue up to the last week so please ensure your son/daughter is aware tasks will continue to be set on Firefly.

However, the last three days of term will be a combination of enrichment and celebration. We will be releasing enrichment tasks for that week, which could also be continued into the summer if desired. We will also be recognising the achievements of the year in a celebration assembly which we also aim to share with parents. We do not want the story of 2019-20 to be exclusively about coronavirus when there is so much that our students have achieved both before and during this time that should be recognised.

September Opening

The Department for Education have now released their guidance for how schools will operate in September. As this was only announced yesterday and is a lengthy document I am hoping parents will understand that we need time to absorb the detail and see how it will translate to our context. We will as always prioritise safety with the very real desire for our school community to be together again, getting on with our core business. We will provide more details next week.

Community

There is a powerful combination of factors that will secure our young people's success: their own commitment and hard work, the track record of the College and the supportive environments of families who value and encourage academic achievement. Whilst not at all complacent we are confident about the position by September, subject staff will know where the students are and have the experience and skill set to build any recovery needed. We are focused on sustained, embedded catch-up where required. We are not interested in expensive sticking plasters that do not have lasting impact.

Moreover, we know there is a wealth of positive energy in the local community who want them to do well. Part of our work next year will be to harness and maximise that local power to support and empower our students. When we work together, it is a formidable force for good.

Of equal importance to academic success is that students are healthy and happy. While some may need to spend time over summer catching up, all should be able to enjoy some of the social activities with friends and family afforded by the reduced restrictions that they have missed over the last few months.

Next week we will bring you further detail and celebration of an eventful but successful year.

Thank you as always for your continued support.

Yours sincerely



MS C BARLOW
Headteacher