

Our ref: PJS/DKP

5 January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

Yesterday I was just finessing the letter about the mass testing as we had planned extensively for its roll-out and then I heard there was an announcement from the prime minister. Obviously the news last night has changed everything again and it's with a heavy heart that I came into work this morning knowing that we're back into lockdown learning for a considerable amount of time. I imagine both yourselves and your children had a similar feeling, although we know it's probably the only sensible way to proceed at the moment.

I thought I would just outline our approach to remote education so you understand our plans and how we're approaching things. According to two contacts I have heard from Westminster, it appears the February half term return may well be partial and have been told not to expect full school to return until after Easter, so we're planning for that situation, whilst hoping for the best.

As mentioned in the previous letter, the home learning this week was fairly standard whilst we prioritised planning for the mass testing. We had meetings yesterday with teachers where the focus was on planning more interactive sessions for next week and for as long as we retain home learning. Departments are submitting their proposals today, which we will then look over and then have the rest of the week to plan/record and we will look at how to timetable the lessons for the end of the week. We are setting up studios in the school with enhanced sound and lighting which teachers will be able to use for recording or live sessions. We have given departments leeway to present information in the way that works best for their subject and the particular topic. As well as ensuring that work is fit for purpose it should also allow some variety of experience for students – we see alternative approaches as a positive rather than something for comparison and complaint. As I mentioned previously, ringing the changes is important for keeping students engaged, the challenge is going to be potentially keeping it fresh for potentially over twelve weeks.

We will run our more interactive timetables from next Monday for three weeks and then do a full evaluation with staff, students and parents. At that point we will try and garner what is most effective, whether the workload is suitable and how the balance of independent and interactive tasks are working.

It would be really helpful if you allow teachers the time and opportunity to experiment and save feedback until we formally ask in three weeks. We are determined to have an improved and improving offer, but that will only happen if we give staff time to try things out and for some things to not be as successful as others if necessary.

There will however be some additions this week prior to next week's launch of interactive learning. In order to keep the students connected and on track with their learning they will have a live tutor session twice a week on a Tuesday and Thursday. With Year 7/8 this will be at 10.40am and for Years 9-11 this will be at 12.40pm in the afternoon for approximately 10 minutes. The aim of these sessions is both to track what work students have done, pass on messages and to maintain that sense of community.

Evidence shows that schools that did this in the last lockdown had higher engagement with work, so we thought it was worth a try. Attendance at these sessions is compulsory and tutors will be following up any students who fail to attend. On Friday at 2.00pm we will be streaming 'ALDWORTH LIVE' which will be our equivalent of The One Show, which will hopefully become a weekly touchpoint over this time. We hope it will be fun and informative for students. This will be produced by the music/drama/PE teachers as the home learning for these subjects is generally less effective, so this will be their contribution to the effort and you should not expect work set in these subjects for lower school.

We are running our key worker provision however I would ask that people only use it if they need it because it does expose staff and students to a degree of risk which is not justifiable if parents send along children when they don't need it, but just in order to get them out of the house. If you are a key worker, please don't be offended if we ask for proof of your key worker status, because unfortunately last time we had some parents who took valuable places and it subsequently turned out they had lied about being key workers. We take our responsibilities to support key workers very seriously however I have to reassure my staff that all student places are suitably vetted.

It is so disappointing to find ourselves in another lockdown, but I am confident that with the hard work of staff and positivity amongst the community we can make the best of this situation.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

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

P Jenkins
Headteacher