

Headteacher's Update: 18th May 2020

Dear parents and carers

Today has been the first day of our new online timetable for key stage 3 students and I am writing with a few reflections.

Overall, it seems to have gone reasonably well and we are grateful for all the messages of support. Thank you to all those students who took part, the vast majority of whom were fantastic, and thank you also to those staff who were brave enough to put themselves forward for the first 'wave'.

As fully expected, there have been one or two issues and we are working urgently to address those at our end. On the one hand, we are rushing to get this up and running as quickly as possible, which inevitably means more teething problems than might otherwise be the case; but, on the other hand, we believe it is important not to be too cautious. Thank you in anticipation of your patience with all this.

We know there were issues in some sessions with a small number of students misusing the technology and/or taking advantage of the opportunity to be silly. In these cases, we are calling individual parents to discuss the behaviour and making it clear that students will have the right to attend future online sessions withdrawn if necessary. We are also making some changes to settings and providing further guidance to teachers so they have more control over the sessions. We'd expect all this to settle down relatively quickly – much of it was down to the novelty of the situation.

There are a couple of ways in which parents and carers can help us at this stage, Firstly, we would appreciate your support in reminding children of the need to behave themselves in a way we'd expect – i.e. the manner in which they do when they are physically in school. Please could you especially remind them that the chat function should only be used to address comments to the teacher and not one another – and also that we can monitor this and will be following up in cases where students are not using it appropriately. It might also be worth reminding children that sessions are recorded. We will, of course, be communicating all this to students ourselves, but it will help if these messages are reinforced at home.

Secondly, I am asking that any constructive criticisms you may have are directed to the senior leadership team (Ms Brennan in the first instance). **Please do not contact individual teachers with any criticisms about online lessons.** I know that nearly all parents appreciate this already, but we need to remember that many teachers have never done this before and are learning as they go along. They are doing this in the knowledge that they are very much in a 'goldfish bowl' whereby parents might be watching them struggle to get to grips with, not just the technology, but a whole different method of teaching, managing behaviour and so on. It doesn't take a great deal of empathy to see that teachers are under a great deal of pressure in this respect.

Similarly, as always, I would really like parents to do us the courtesy of contacting us directly with any feedback rather than resorting to complaining publicly on social media: this rarely helps anyone. You will always get a response from the school if you contact us – and, if for any reason you do not, you will certainly get one from me if you make me aware.

On a different note – and I apologise for not making this more explicit in my update on Friday – I want to make it clear that Year 10 and 12 have absolutely not been forgotten in all this. Had the government announcement about schools needing to be ready to open on 1st June for some face-to-face time with these year groups not come last week, then Year 10 and 12 would have been included in the online timetable this

week. We simply put the plans for these year groups on ice for just one more week whilst we wait for more clarity about what is to happen from 1st June; because, whatever we do, this will have to marry up with online timetables and we could have got ourselves in a tangle over this if we'd gone ahead this week. Regardless, whatever happens with face-to-face teaching, you can be sure that there will be a lot more in the way of a consistent online offer for Year 10 and 12 after the half-term break.

Many thanks again for your support, and to those of you who have offered feedback today. We will continue to act on this as quickly as we possibly can.

Kind regards

Gwyn Williams