

6th May 2020

Dear Parent or Guardian

I am writing to you to give you an outline of the parental feedback we received recently and how we intend to respond to it as well as a brief update of our planning for the potential reopening of College.

Parental Feedback

Thank you very much to all those parents who responded to our recent survey. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive both in recognizing the improvement in our communications and also the strength of our support for students learning from home during the lockdown. I am also grateful for the constructive suggestions for areas we could improve. I don't think I'm alone in sensing a widespread desire to pull together in the face of such challenging circumstances and I have to say your support is really heartening.

If anything, the positive nature of your feedback increases our determination to bring about the improvements you suggested and our Deputy Principal Ruth Scotson will follow up each comment relating to individual subjects. Similarly the Senior Leader for Student Wellbeing Julie Ferman will ensure that parents receive more information about the pastoral and safeguarding support available for students during lockdown.

I would like to briefly respond to those comments that suggested that some online 'teaching' via platforms such as 'Teams' or 'Zoom' is important in maintaining the motivation and focus of students during an extended period of isolation such as this.

I agree with this view, however, it was my decision at the time to say that teachers were free to choose the methods they felt most confident in using with their groups and that although encouraged on-line lessons were not compulsory.

My reasoning for this decision was threefold.

- 1, that there were some issues of confidence and competence with these technologies and techniques for some of us and while we had focused recent training on this area these issues were not fully resolved. Similarly I was not confident that all students had the confidence or resources to access on line lessons and wanted staff and students to adopt the methods that they felt confident in using, particularly in such challenging circumstances.
- 2, I had concerns about the resilience of the College IT system at the time (if you remember we had experienced two weeks of disruption almost immediately prior to College closure).
- 3, I was uncertain whether each teacher (and student) had the required resources at home.

We will work to increase the provision of on-line lessons as one of a number of strategies used by teachers to support students in learning from home.

- 1, I have asked Sally Johnson, Senior Leader for Teaching and Learning to provide additional training in this area. She will organize training for staff that can be done on-line but also more supported training when we return to College.
- 2, Thanks to the efforts of our IT team, our system has returned to our expected levels of service. Carl Rusby is the Senior Leader responsible for this area and he has taken steps to strengthen our IT system further through the purchase of new servers and cabling and also via new classroom resources such as cameras and 'visualisers' that will encourage more direct involvement for students who for example have to learn from home in order to isolate due to underlying health conditions.

3, We have supported a number of students who lacked IT resources at home via the loan of College resources. We will explore any IT resource needs with teachers and have purchased additional laptops to meet future needs.

Clearly these measures will take a little time to have their full impact but I hope that I have reassured you that we are focused on responding to your feedback and providing the best possible support to our students. If your son or daughter has problems with access to IT resources please ask them to contact their Head of Year to see whether we can help.

Preparations for reopening College

The Government has said that they will announce their detailed plans for the lifting of aspects of the current lockdown on Sunday. It is widely believed that the reopening of schools and Colleges will be one of their priorities and that a date as early as the beginning of June is a possibility.

It is for the Government to determine whether it is safe for us to return to work and studying. Clearly there are significant risks posed to the development, learning and progression of our young people if they are denied access to their teachers for a lengthy period. Regardless of our efforts to provide our students with the best possible support in learning from home it is no substitute for time spent in class with teachers and classmates. Consequently, along with the senior leadership team, I have been risk assessing and planning to ensure that if the College is required to reopen we do so as safely and effectively as possible. Final arrangements will need to be determined once the government has provided its detailed plans this weekend, and I suspect that even after reopening we will need to continue to respond to new advice and circumstances. Nevertheless I want to give you a sense of the likely measures so that you are better able to reflect on the Government's guidance this weekend and start to consider what you can do to keep your son or daughter safe as the lockdown begins to lift (assuming this is what they announce).

Up to now the Government has equated social distancing measures with a 2-metre distance between people. I can't find a clear medical basis for this 'rule' and indeed the WHO recommend 1.5 metres. We will continue to follow the Government's guidance in this regard however given the physical limitations of the College it may not be possible to maintain the 2-metre distance between each person at all times, although we will do this wherever possible and it is a priority for areas where staff and students will spend significant periods of time such as classrooms. This means that we will have to restrict numbers in each class which in turn means that your son or daughter will have a reduced timetable when they return. Similarly they will be encouraged to be at College only for their lessons wherever possible (arrangements will be put in place for those who can't return home during the day). We will employ one-way systems in corridors and on staircases and additional cleaning will be put in place.

Opportunities for social mixing will be curbed, so for example the social and study space in College will only be available to those who can't go home during the day (the smoking area will be closed), the Cafeteria will be providing a minimal service, and the 2-metre rule will be applied in any social or study space.

Some staff and students, for example those with underlying health conditions which place them in a high risk group or those who live with family members who have underlying health conditions which place them in a high risk group, will need to remain in isolation. Consequently teachers will continue to provide support for them to learn from home.

What can you do to help

Listen out for the Government's guidance this weekend (I will update you as soon as I can next week) and consider what it means in practical terms for your family.

All members of the College will be required to stay at home if they display any symptoms (however mild) which might indicate infection with the virus. We will need parents to help us enforce this so it would be helpful if you ensure that you have a thermometer at home.

Where students need to use public transport the 2-metre rule may not be possible. Consider whether other travel arrangements are possible or whether there are other measures you can take to promote the well-being of your son or daughter.

With the last point in mind, and also in view of likely College arrangements, I await the Government's advice on face masks (and PPE) with keen interest. Obviously I am no expert on public health and from what I have read the evidence is inconclusive, nevertheless as a parent it has not escaped my attention that many countries do require people to wear face masks in public. Consequently, I have been on-line to purchase them for members of my family at a cost of about £4.50 an item. My wife and eldest son are rather more resourceful than me and they found instructions on-line to make their own face masks. As we don't have a sewing machine they used instructions to make masks which didn't require one, or even any sewing, and in 15-20 minutes they had turned an old T shirt into 2 face masks. If you wish to explore this option they followed the link presented by typing Anjurisa into Youtube.

With best wishes to you and your family
Ed Senior