29th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

**‘Back to school’ is on the horizon.** This week the Prime Minister has announced that it will not be possible to resume face-to-face learning immediately after the February half-term and instead hopes it will be safe to commence the re-opening of schools and colleges from Monday 8 March. We are told that this is in response to the national public health data and pressure on NHS capacity.

If the Government achieves its target of vaccinating everyone in the four most vulnerable groups with their first dose by 15 February then those groups will have developed immunity from the virus around three weeks later, that is by 8 March. The DfE tell us that it is for this reason that it will be safe to commence the reopening of schools from Monday 8 March.

We have been assured that we will be able to give parents and carers at least two weeks notice to prepare for a return to face-to-face education and we are starting to make plans for this.

**Thanks for your comments.** Many thanks for all those who contributed to our ‘temperature test’ survey on home learning. The support and helpful suggestions we get from our community is truly remarkable and the growing strength of our partnership is one of the things that is allowing us to progress and improve as a community at such a rapid rate. We can’t always respond to every suggestion and indeed some suggestions conflict with each other, but we appreciate being able to understand things from parent/carer and student perspectives. In response to your most recent questionnaire we are making a couple of changes to how E-praise is set up. From Monday all lessons will be visible a day ahead. Any students anxious about work not completed, should focus on moving forward and not worry about the past. The message is – don’t let past work be a barrier to you getting on with the work set today. If things haven’t gone to plan in the past, press on – each day is a new day, with new opportunities to be successful. Please watch our short but important video which explains this further: <https://youtu.be/BUnLfWyOkME>

**Thanks for generosity of spirit.** I have been humbled by the kind and generous offers of funding for lap tops from members of our community. Demand still exceeds our supply but we appreciate being able to support as many young people as possible who are struggling through a lack of technology. We are keen to support any families who are struggling financial hardships too, many of whom are worrying about where their next meal will come from. If this is affecting you please do let Miss Warwick know so that we can help out and signpost to useful services. Thanks to the generosity of our community we are also able to provide support for families that might struggle over half term. Please let us know if you need help. In our lockdown times many are isolating, but it is our hope that no one feels isolated.

**Virtual consultation meetings.** Many thanks to parents and carers for working with us to improve the experience of virtual consultation evenings. I know from personal experience of being an ‘end user’ the stress of dashing home for appointments with your child and then finding that you need to download an updated web browser to make the system work! Why is it that PCs always decide to update when you are in a hurry? For our Y11 evening next Thursday, we will make a phone number available to help those who are struggling to log on. We realise that those who book appointments later may find that teachers don’t have the same availability as those who book earlier, but if you miss out on an appointment just message the teacher and they will always be willing to catch up to make sure you don’t miss out. If you have any worries please don’t post them on social media for the world to see. Hopefully by now you know we are not a faceless establishment, but we are made up of human beings willing to do all that we can for the good of our young people – just let us know and we will do all that we can to help.

**Screen time.** We learnt from the last parents evening that some teachers had been live streaming lessons all day and then did video calls for three hours in the evening. We are also conscious that the continual screen work isn’t ideal for our young people either. We are currently working to bring forward our Curriculum Enrichment day to next Thursday. The plan is to give your child some activities that don’t involve a full day of screen time, but that broaden their learning experience. Of course, the more your child *gives* to the experience the more they will *get* from it. More information will follow. Next week is mental health week. Watch out for a variety of posts for students and parents via facebook and e-praise about how to boost and look after your own wellbeing.

**GCSEs.** We are still awaiting final decisions from Ofqual about the awarding of GCSE results in 2021. But you may have seen that Bolton was the 4th hardest hit area of the country in terms of COVID related absence rates. In the rolling year since March 2020, most students will have only had a maximum of 68 days in school and many will have had significantly less through isolation. We are doing our best to adjust the curriculum to consolidate virtual learning and prepare students for their GCSEs and life beyond. However, it is important that we keep up the pressure on Ofqual and the DfE to make plans clear for the awarding of GCSEs 2022 and beyond. The sooner schools know about this, the sooner we can prepare young people for what they might face. Clearly, children and schools across the country have had a very different level of challenges. We will continue to stress this point with Ofqual and the DfE to ensure the playing field is levelled and we get the fairest processes in place for our young people.

Take Care and God Bless! I wish you a cosy, Covid free weekend in.

*Tony McCabe*

*Headteacher*