21st January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

**When will schools return?** I write to touch base and keep you posted on what we know about the current landscape and future school opening. Admittedly, this is very little but we thought we would share what we know. You may have seen in the press that the Education Secretary has said that schools would be given two weeks’ notice before they were asked start opening their doors to more students. The Prime Minister has said that he would be announcing a review of lockdown arrangements on the 15th February and that schools would be a high priority for reopening. There is also speculation about whether lockdown would be released on a regional basis based on the infection rate in that area, or indeed whether parts of the lockdown would stretch until summer. Reading between the lines, although we can’t say with any certainty it would therefore seem sensible to assume that schools are unlikely to open for any further students until at least March.

**Learning Matters.** This means that we must all do our best to ensure that all of our learners make the most of online learning. Please encourage students to attend the live on-line lessons. I know only too well, from personal experience, the challenges of a whole household trying to live stream at once, but please try to make these a priority. We are measuring each student’s engagement with our online provision, both in terms of lesson engagement and handing in work. Students should be following the school day from 8.30am to 2.45pm and where, possible accessing the live lessons as this is where their teachers can support their questions and give more personalised instruction. Encourage your child to be up, dressed, curtains undrawn and ready to engage at 8:30am. In case you have any questions about remote learning here is a reminder of our most recent guidance.  <https://youtu.be/jREY-0JNmLs>

**Get involved.** The best learning takes place when students are involved in the lesson by asking/responding to questions either in the chat facility or it is even better for the teacher and the class to hear each other’s voices. You wouldn’t believe the lift it gives to a teacher when they have streamed five lessons in front of a screen to occasionally see the smiling appreciative faces of students! Please see information about our remote learning offer. We have put the links on our school homepage to try to make things easier [www.stjosephsbolton.org.uk](http://www.stjosephsbolton.org.uk) . Thank you for all your comments and suggestions on our remote offer. We value your feedback. It helps us to shape our improvement plans and staff find your comments encouraging.

**Have your say.** Ofqual have launched a consultation on GCSE awarding from 2021. We have shared links with students and parent/carers of Y11. The overall proposals seem sensible (certainly in comparison to last year) but please make your voices heard by joining the collaboration. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021>

**Testing times.** Recent media coverage has suggested that the programme of mass testing of staff and students in secondary schools must be paused. We have been told from the DfE that this is incorrect. Our testing programme, using rapid lateral flow tests to find asymptomatic staff and students and those who have coronavirus (COVID-19) but do not have symptoms, is continuing.

However, following new advice from NHS Test and Trace and Public Health England (PHE), we are temporarily pausing the *daily contact testing* element of the testing programme, which was in place as an alternative to self-isolation for those who came into contact with positive cases in school. We are therefore still testing consenting staff up to twice a week and our vulnerable/key worker children who have permissions each week. I would like to give a big shout out to the staff in school who have organised the testing centre and planned for it to operate safely. A huge task and one that was definitely not in their job descriptions. We also need to thank our students who have participated in such a mature fashion and made the process as simple as possible. It looks like we might be told to ask all students for consent for testing prior to them returning to school, so if you would like to give consent in preparation, please follow this link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=sHAoOFeTq0ONO_0gvTFzyi7Eux8QJv5CpxLFK9r_r2RUN1E5REVJUDdSUjJYM0s1TUdPMVg2WlQ5Sy4u> The privacy notice and risk assessment is on the ‘letters’ section of our website.

**Mental Health Awareness.** Next Wednesday is holocaust memorial day and our reflections will call to mind the atrocities of what happened in this period of history so that our students can see the need to be on guard to stand up against any injustice people face in their lives today. It is also Children’s Mental Health Awareness week. We will be using this week to raise awareness of the importance of maintaining a positive mindset. Watch out for our activities during the week and as always, please check out the ‘Wellbeing’ part of our website for useful resources. <https://stjosephsbolton.org.uk/wellbeing-support>

**Kintsugi Hope.** I am reminded of a message from Patrick Regan, CEO of Kintsugi Hope. The word Kintsugi means ‘golden joinery’ in Japanese and is a technique used to repair pottery, arguably making the object more beautiful despite it’s brokenness. In times of hardship, let us remember that this is true of us, in our brokenness we become more beautiful and in time we become stronger. Whatever you and your families might be facing at this moment let’s work together to see a world where mental and emotional health is understood and accepted, with safe and supportive communities for everyone to grow and flourish. In a recent address Patrick’s advice struck a chord with me and I hope it is encouraging for you:

*“Note to self. It is ok not to be ok all the time. Making a mistake doesn’t make you a failure. Struggling doesn’t make you a failure. The plan is this…you do what you can, when you can, however you can, with whatever you have got. And if you can’t, you can’t. Ask help from the people around you, who can. And rest until you can again...or if you can, do something for the person who is helping you. Give yourself kindness so your pockets are full and you can reach in and pull out a fistful to offer to folks you meet along the way.”*

Good advice for us all

Take care and God Bless!

Mr T McCabe

Headteacher