12th February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

As we come to the end of yet another half term of lockdown, I write to express our sincere thanks for your support during this time. Our online learning package has evolved and we are grateful for your suggestions as we have tried to tailor improvements to meet student needs. You will have read in the national media that there is a lot of catastrophising about the damage done through time out of school due to coronavirus and of course there will be some who need support to catchup on the skills and knowledge and practical activities that have not been possible during school closure. My experience of our young people leads me to believe that they have amazing resilience and have learned a great skill in taking ownership of their own learning and realising that with a bit of imagination, hard work and persistence, we can overcome the challenges we face and reach our goals.

School partial closure has encouraged staff and students to think differently. Many young people have used this as an opportunity to develop their creative flair, for example by using household products such as beetroot juice, coffee and tea to paint impressive landscapes, Lego characters with a musical backdrop have been used to bring out the deeper meaning of historical events and parables and the local gym has been replaced by the household kitchen as the PE department lead the school in a weekly workout. Thank you for encouraging your children to keep positive and to keep on giving of themselves. These are all skills that will help prepare your child for life beyond school. To give time to consolidate the Curriculum with more face to face teaching, we have taken the decision to extend the current school timetable for the Autumn term for Y7-10. This means that Y8 who would normally be choosing which subjects they will specialise in now, will be given another term to consolidate their learning and make informed choices. It also reduces the number of changes that our young people will have to face and provide some much needed consistency. The finer details still need to be checked but we felt that it is important for you to know that we have plans in place.

At the time of writing we have not been given any clear details about what school opening might look like, but once again rather than leave you wondering and worrying about this, this is what we do know. The 8th March was given as a possible date to begin reopening although some press reports today are suggesting that this might be unlikely. I would imagine that if the local intelligence suggests it is safe to do so, we would be ready to start inviting students back into school in a controlled, staggered way. Our testing centre is fully operational, so if we are advised to test consenting students before entry to school, you can be reassured that we are ready and prepared. We would begin with the year groups most vulnerable in their learning to bring them back to ‘normality’ as soon as possible. We have been promised a two week warning to make full preparations and update risk assessments, so as soon as we know anything you will be the first to hear.

During the half term break we will be commemorating Ash Wednesday. Please watch out for the prayerful resource that our Student Leaders have prepared to help us make a good start to Lent. During Lent we will be raising Money for St Joseph’s Penny, a Catholic Charity helping those in need our local area. To build ‘solidarity’ and ‘togetherness’ we will be ‘walking’ the Camino Way (in our imagination as we pace the streets of Bolton!) The pilgrimage was popular in the 10th, 11th, and 12th centuries as a place to walk/ponder and grow in faith.  In the 21st century, the idea of a pilgrimage is perhaps quaint. However, the exertion of walking for a month and being disconnected to modern devices will hopefully be immensely liberating.  We will be seeing how many times we can cover the miles of the route as a school community during Lent and asking for sponsorship for every mile covered. We hope that all students will join in with the challenge.   <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=sHAoOFeTq0ONO_0gvTFzygaAbxmZJAFCtHoyyEOMuKpUQTdSWFU2RUdUQjlTNVZTMTRSQ0EwMFdGRy4u>

Please see the attached letter from Dr Helen Lowey (Director of Public Health) and Bernie Brown (Director of Children’s Services) outlining what each of us can do to help stop the spread of coronavirus in Bolton.

May I take this opportunity to wish you a relaxing half term break.

Take Care and God bless!

*Tony McCabe*

*Headteacher*