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Head of School: Chris Eccles

Thursday 11th February 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I would like to start by thanking you for your continued support during what has been possibly the most challenging half-term so far during the pandemic. I have been incredibly impressed with the resilience of our pupils and the way they have embraced their blended learning. We have had some additional challenges with our internet connection that I know have caused frustration for pupils, parents and staff. These were issues linked to the security we have on all our devices to safeguard pupils when they are at home. Through the hard work and perseverance of our IT technician team, we now believe we have resolved these problems and look forward to uninterrupted blended learning after half-term.

Our recent parent and pupil surveys on blended learning, have shown us that the approach we have adopted this time, with pupils following their regular timetables and the use of live lessons, has been well received and helped engage pupils with their learning. In addition, staff have been working together to develop different strategies to deliver learning, give pupils feedback and assess their learning. It is no substitute for being in a classroom together, but we are confident that pupils have continued to learn and, in many cases, develop new skills during this period of lockdown.

INSET Day and February Half-term

Tomorrow is an INSET day; our teachers and staff are taking part in distance development activities. Pupils will not receive any blended learning activities on that day. For pupils, it will provide a well-deserved rest from working on their devices and marks the beginning of the February half-term break.

School will be closed to all pupils over the half-term (Monday 15th to Friday 19th February); including for critical workers and vulnerable pupils. The new term will start on Monday 22nd February. Although there is more than likely to be significant restrictions in place to support the reduction in the transmission of the virus, I would like to urge pupils to use the week to have time away from their screens and enjoy some downtime if possible.

It was announced a few weeks ago that schools will not return until at least 8th March and we will be given two weeks notice of any change to the current position. In the meantime, we will expect only the pupils who have been given a place in school this half-term to return to

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the building on 22nd February, all other pupils should login at 9am with their tutors and then continue with their blended learning at home inline with their school timetable.

Free School Meals

I am pleased to announce that families who receive free school meals, will continue to receive their vouchers over the half-term break. This has been supported by RMBC, who has provided funding to schools to support this through the COVID Winter Grant Scheme.

Positive COVID results during the half-term break

School has been playing an important role in contact tracing for pupils and staff who attend daily. If your child has attended school this week and then tests positive for COVID 19 in half-term, please email attendance@oakwood.ac to inform us. You will need to give details of when they were last in school, the day they started with symptoms and the day of the positive result. In addition, any names of pupils they have been in contact with on their way to and from school will help us conduct a thorough contact tracing exercise.

Key Events after Half-term

After the half-term break, there are a number of important events taking place.

Year 8 Options

Pupils will begin the process of making their subject choices for Year 9. They will be supported through this process by their Making Aspirations Possible (MAP) teachers and their tutors. All pupils will receive individual guidance through the Options process, as well as detailed information on all subjects available and there will be an opportunity for parents and pupils to discuss Option choices before making any decisions at the planned Year 8 virtual Parents Evening on Tuesday 13th April. I know making choices can be a stressful time for pupils and parents, we hope the process we have in place will support everyone through to make the most appropriate choices.

Year 8 Internal Linear Exams (ILEs) Assessments

The ILEs scheduled from the 22nd February will not be able to take place in the usual way. However, pupils will still receive remote assessment activities during this time period to help support teachers evaluate the progress pupils have made. The results of these assessments will hopefully help to support them when they come to make their Option choices later in the term. The assessments will take place during normal lessons but will be planned across the first two week period to ensure pupils do not have more than two assessments/ILEs in any one day. The assessments have been set up to be done online. Planning, preparation and revision will be delivered through the pupils' blended learning lessons.

Parents Evenings are an important part of ensuring pupils are supported throughout the school year. **Year 10** pupils will have their virtual subject Parents Evening on Wednesday 24th February, 3.30-7.00pm. Details of how to make appointments have been sent to parents

already and I would like to remind you that the booking system is still open. Each appointment will be delivered through Google Meet. This is the system that your child has been using throughout this lockdown and they are well-versed in how to join a meet. Your child will receive an invite on the day from the subject teacher you have made the appointment with. All appointments will last for a **maximum of 10 minutes**, and this must be strictly adhered to so that the next appointment can take place for both you and the class teacher and you. To help with this, each teacher will state that there are two minutes of the appointment left.

GCSE Update

There is nothing further to report on the exam front, although we now believe we will receive the outcome of the consultation on 22nd February. Once we have received this, I will share what the plan is for assessing pupils' grades this summer.

You will have heard recently that the Government have appointed a Catch-up Commissioner to help pupils following lockdown. There is a lot of talk in the media about 'lost learning', 'catch up' and the 'lost generation', this emotive language can be both misleading and damaging. The experience our young people have had over the last 12 months is not one we would have planned for them and it will affect some in many different ways, however, it is important to remember that young people are very adaptable and resilient. They have not been learning in the traditional way plus there has been a loss of social interaction and opportunities, yet they have still been learning and developing new skills. When we return later next half-term, we will continue to implement our recovery plan aimed at rebuilding relationships, re-engaging pupils with collaborative learning, re-establishing routines and resetting the curriculum. We will take a trauma informed approach, identifying individual needs and responding accordingly. In this way we hope pupils will have a positive experience and be fully supported on their return and, as a result, continue to learn and make progress.

Once again can I thank you for your ongoing support and I hope your family and you remain safe and well during the coming weeks and remember we are here to help all members of the Oakwood community.

Yours faithfully,

Mr C Eccles - Head of School