



'We value the power of education to change lives.'

15th May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

Re: School Update

As we approach the end of the 7th week of our students receiving their education off-site I want to thank, on behalf of all my colleagues and our Governing Body, our parents and carers for the tremendous level of support and encouragement being provided for students at home. My colleagues and I know learning without the physical presence of a teacher or a TA is not straightforward. It demands patience, resilience, determination, and practical problem solving from parents and carers almost as much as from the students.

Our decision to expand the Homestudy system on MyHighcliffe into the core method of supporting distance learning has worked well. Testament to this is the amount of student learning which has taken place. We are aware not every piece of work done is uploaded so it is particularly encouraging that in every Year Group 7 to 10 over the 7 school weeks of distance learning so far, on average approximately two thirds of all the work set is uploaded by students, and far more in Year 12. The actual amount of work completed is therefore likely to be more than two thirds, although it of course varies considerably between different students.

However, the key factor in helping most students stay motivated and up-to-date is clearly parents and carers being supportive, encouraging and as helpful as you can be in the role of your son or daughter's home-teacher. **Thank you Highcliffe parents - you are doing a wonderful job in difficult circumstances for you and your whole family.** We are hoping to capture, in an online survey to be sent out shortly to all parents, some of the ideas and approaches you have found work best with your son or daughter to help them learn. It will be of great help to us and other parents if you take a few minutes to share any successful approaches you have found, so please complete the survey when it comes out.

Our distance-learning programme has evolved over the period since we closed before Easter. As students learning at home, and staff teaching from home, have adjusted to their new roles, the amount of learning time experienced by students has expanded to be closer to the 5 hours of learning which normally takes place in school, plus the one to four hours of homestudy which typically takes place at home depending on the age group; although this will vary day-to-day. The academic standard of that learning, and therefore how challenging it is to do at home, has risen. To assist when there are problems, MyHelp is on hand for Year 7 to 10 students. The frequency of verbal or written feedback given on work, or online 'Q & A' sessions with a teacher, have increased significantly (prioritising Years 12 and 10 at first) and will increase further as we go on, albeit always mindful of keeping to a realistic minimum the amount of time a student needs to be interacting with a screen in order to do their learning.

Looking to the future, following the Prime Minister's announcement last Sunday, there are some mixed messages about what may occur after May half-term and when. Further guidance and clarification to schools is promised about:

- the planned roll-out of secondary school re-opening
- how social distancing must work in schools and the limits that will impose on what being back in school is like for students, and how many can be on site at the same time
- how the journey to and from school can be completed safely

My colleagues and I have been evaluating different scenarios for partial or full re-opening for several weeks now. However firm plans must wait for the detailed guidance and clarification all schools need

and which we have been promised; and of course, are subject to possible change or cancellation as the Prime Minister made clear on Sunday. *We are keen to return students to school as soon as possible but I am sure you agree students can begin returning to Highcliffe School only when we are sure it is appropriate for them to do so in terms of student and staff safety*, and government scientific advice in the next few weeks and months is the critical factor in when this will occur. Whenever this is, students will return to an educational experience altered by the practicalities of the school complying with social distancing measures and other constraints. At present we are assuming from the messages communicated so far by the government (*but await confirmation*) that:

- the provision for Key Worker students on site will continue after May half-term
- the return of Years 10 and 12 *after* 1st June, not *on* 1st June, is currently an intended next step in England, but the government are being very careful not to state this will definitely happen nor set any particular date for it. They are saying a firmer decision will be made during the next few weeks informed by scientific advice. Current government guidance is emphasising that any limited return for these year groups, if it occurs at all, will only be for some form of face-to-face contact with teachers and not for 'normal' education or a 'normal' timetable. We are putting in place plans to ensure any time back in school with Year 10 and 12, if it is possible, is as productive for them as it can be
- the return of Years 7 to 9 before the summer term finally ends is an 'aspiration' according to the government language used so far, but not currently an intention. Any partial or full return of students in Years 7 to 9 before summer term ends will depend on government scientific advice in the coming weeks, and clear guidance and information from the government about how to achieve this safely

We will of course update you as we learn more and integrate it into our planning. Thank you for your patience and support.

Taking all this into account, we will continue to focus on our distance-learning programme for now. In the last two weeks the programme has expanded to include assemblies, tutor group activities, careers education, fun competitions and activities encouraging online interaction between students. In addition, we are currently exploring strategies for use after half-term to encourage students to connect in pairs and groups with other students to share their learning and work together, to help mitigate the sense of isolation we know from feedback many of you are inevitably experiencing under lockdown.

Activities Week in July will not go ahead, whether students are back in school or not. The venue for the Year 11 Prom has confirmed it will not go ahead, nor will the Year 13 Leavers event. Alternative online leavers events during the school day are being planned to replace both these events. Year 10 Work Experience will not take place and we will be able to refund in full the costs already incurred by parents for the external administration of the placements.

In these challenging times I continue to feel in awe of and grateful for the talents, dedication, and teamwork of colleagues, students, and parents and carers. Your extraordinarily supportive and pragmatic response to the school's situation inspires me and, I hope, also each other. Together you personify how 'we value the power of education to change lives' and the strength of our very special Highcliffe School community.

Warmest wishes,



Patrick Earnshaw
Headteacher