

6<sup>th</sup> January 2021  
17:00

Dear Families,

**Re: Remote Learning, Mass testing and Rescheduled Events (including year 11 mock exam results)**

Only a couple of hours after I wrote to you on the 4<sup>th</sup> January, the country was put into full lockdown until at least February half term. We are saddened that we will not be able to see your children and teach them in person, face to face, but considering the steep rise in number of positive cases and deaths, it is not surprising that this decision has been made, particularly with the new variant of COVID-19.

Given the situation we are in now with all lessons being taught remotely, I am very grateful that we made the decision to focus on the set up of Teams during the first lockdown so that our students are now able to access a full timetable with their usual classroom teachers. We have received so many positive messages from families that has brought a smile to the faces of my colleagues and to me during this difficult time. Some of the messages include:

"I know we saw it coming but just to say a huge 'well done' and 'thank you' to you and your staff in being ahead of the curve and preparing a full-time online teaching timetable!"

"Yes, home schooling is hard...but the level of learning hasn't gone down for the kids. All lessons still have a high level of learning. At this time in the world, a huge, huge thank you".

"We're all here supporting you, whatever comes your way".

"I just wanted to thank you so much for the way you're dealing with such difficult times. I am so impressed with the school. I think you've been excellent, organised and I have confidence in the teaching skills and organisation of the individual teachers. Credit where credit is due".

Thank you for your kindness – I cannot express how much these words mean to everyone at Burton Borough School right now!

**Teams**

The vast majority of lessons yesterday and today were able to take place with no hiccups although I understand from my colleagues that there were a couple of subject classes for year 9 Science in particular, that had disappeared from the channels. We are working very hard to resolve this and most of the classes are now available. We apologise for this technical error.

A few teachers reported to me that there were some possible network/bandwidth issues earlier today. We think that this is an external issue with Teams that has now been resolved by Microsoft. Lessons ran much smoother this afternoon.

**Contingency plan if Teams does not work**

In my last letter, I highlighted some useful websites such as Hegarty Maths, Bedrock and Massolit that students may use should a lesson not be able to take place on Teams. I am delighted to say that the Curriculum section of our website has also been updated with a list of useful websites for many more subjects. As a reminder, you can find these web addresses on our website at:

**Curriculum / Useful Websites (COVID-19)**



The BBC announced yesterday that they will be helping to provide some secondary school education on BBC Two for two hours each weekday. This may be useful if your internet connection goes down and cannot access our Teams lessons.

### **Year 11 – Mock Results and Examinations 2021**

It has just been confirmed by the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, that GCSE examinations will **not** be going ahead this Summer and that Centre Assessed Grades will be used. The decision on whether vocational examinations (such as Btec and Cambridge Nationals) taking place in January and February will be for the school to decide.

We are currently in discussions as to what our decision on this will be. Whatever our decision, it will be the one we believe is best for the students in terms of the grades we believe they will achieve and for their safety while we are being advised to stay at home.

We will be writing to the families of students affected by the vocational qualification announcement separately over the next couple of days.

We know that students will be very upset by this development as they have worked so hard and will want to prove what they can do in a final examination. We completely understand their frustration and will do whatever we can as a school to support them. Please do let us know if your child has been particularly affected and try and reassure them that everything will work out in the end.

The mock results evening was due to take place on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021. However, with the national lockdown, this will not take place as it usually does where we would be in the main hall with a presentation and results given out afterwards. We will be pre-recording a presentation and send it to families prior to the 28<sup>th</sup> January and release the mock results on the 28<sup>th</sup>. More information to follow nearer the time.

### **Year 11 'All About Me' Employability Conference**

Due to the Government guidelines we have had to postpone the Year 11 Employability Conference that was due to take place on 22<sup>nd</sup> January. This will now take place on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> April. The application forms will still need to be completed and emailed to Mrs Kane, but the deadline has been extended to 31<sup>st</sup> January for completion. These forms were emailed to students and families in December and were also uploaded to Show My Homework. Please also see a copy attached to the email.

### **Year 9 Parents'/Carers' Evening**

This event will now be held on the 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 via Teams. More information to follow soon.

### **Mass Testing Update**

In my previous correspondence, I explained that I was hoping to gain more information from the Department of Education and Public Health England with regards to the accuracy of the lateral flow tests that the government is keen for schools to offer. Unfortunately, after sitting through the three webinars delivered by the DfE and PHE, I am none the wiser. My biggest concern in particular, is how accurate the tests are when they are self-administered (as this is how it will be carried out and not by trained health care professionals) and whether we could potentially be placed in a dangerous situation where students or staff who are carrying the virus receive a negative result.

Presenters at all three webinars gave different figures. The figures ranged from 58% accuracy when a trained adult administered the test to one presenter saying that the test was over 90% accurate. What they could not answer, was how accurate the tests were in the pilot projects with secondary schools when children/students were administering the tests themselves and not trained healthcare or scientific laboratory staff (the government's own documentation says that even then it ranges from 73% to 79%). This is particularly concerning to me as it has been reported that in the Birmingham University trial, the lateral flow tests were only 3.2% accurate when picking up positive cases, with nearly 97% of positive cases being missed when many of the tests were administered by the young



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adults themselves. The government documentation itself also shows that the accuracy of the tests decline when not carried out by a medical professional. This raises the question as to whether we could potentially be spreading the virus more from not isolating and coming into school, thinking that we have a negative result.

I had a meeting at local level with the Director of Skills and Education, Head of the Health Protection Hub and Executive Director of Children and Family Services yesterday and I have forwarded them my questions and concerns. The Director of Education and Skills has kindly said that he will pass on my queries to his direct link at the DfE and the Head of the Health Protection Hub has said that she will pass on my concerns to the relevant person too. I am hoping to receive direct answers to my questions as the DfE and PHE were unable to answer them during the three webinars.

As mentioned above, the accuracy of the tests is only one of the concerns I have. The safety of the Burton Borough School community and Newport is absolutely paramount to me and unless I have the answers to what I believe are very basic questions, it raises the question whether this initiative, that was announced suddenly before Christmas, has really been properly thought through.

I will update families when I (hopefully) receive more information from the DfE or PHE. However, I wanted to inform you of why I am reluctant to ask for consent at the moment from you as I do not believe that there is sufficient information for you to decide whether it is safe for this to be carried out for us as a school and your child.

I know that there are a number of families who have already raised concern about the mass testing – I completely understand where you are coming from. Please be assured that I am asking exactly the same questions as you and once I have the answers, I will let you know.

Thank you for supporting your children with home-schooling – we really appreciate it as a school!

With all good wishes and stay safe,



Krissi Carter  
Principal



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