



Charles Darwin School

Operated by the Charles Darwin Academy Trust

Headteacher: Sunil Chotai, BSc

15th October 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that this letter finds you and all your families in good health and free from any impact of this virus.

As everyone will be aware we have been back to School after the prolonged school closure for about half a term now and I am writing to update you on how the half term has progressed and to point out a few key considerations for the future.

The start of the year

As you will appreciate we started this academic year with a whole host of new arrangements, I outlined all of these in my letters to parents at the end of August and the start of September. The arrangements were and continue to be intricate, with children taught in classrooms in their bubbles, with staggered start times, staggered lunch arrangements and staggered dismissal from school.

On the whole these arrangements have worked very well in school. They have however made significantly increased demands on our staff in terms of movement across the school, additional duties, much increased need for student supervision generally, a substantial increase in cleaning and of course the complications of planning for lessons without access to specialist rooms and resources. Our students have on the whole coped well, they have risen to the additional demands placed on them and they are managing very well overall.

Whilst these arrangements have worked, how well we are able to sustain them for a prolonged period that now seems inevitable will depend on students' continued adherence to the routines and procedures that we have put in place. **I would just like parents and carers to support us and reinforce this message at home please.**

As most parents will know we had a confirmed case of the virus in our Sixth Form and as a consequence we had to ask 30 students to self-isolate. It seems to me that these sorts of scenarios are likely to be repeated during the next couple of school terms as the virus seems to prevail in the community at large.

More use of specialist rooms

Going forward it is our intention to explore the use of more specialist rooms whilst still maintaining the integrity of the "bubbles". We have already implemented more specialist room use for key examination classes and our plan is to increase this over the next few weeks in an ordered and manageable way. This will, we hope, help further enhance the delivery of the curriculum in key subjects. This will unfortunately make further significant demands on levels of maturity and responsibility from our students; they will be venturing into parts of the school occupied by other "bubbles" and this will only be safe if they conduct themselves exactly as we direct them. I am confident that our students will manage this well.

Uniform Matters

One of the key precautions that we have to have in place across the school is good enhanced ventilation, so windows and doors are generally kept open. This unfortunately means that parts of our school will be colder than normal.

After the October half term we will not be allowing students to wear coats in class. In preparation for the winter months we are asking parents to ensure that students have a school jumper (V-neck navy blue), or a suitable equivalent V-neck plain dark blue jumper to wear in the classroom. Hoodies/track suit tops are not acceptable. We believe that this should give parents and carers sufficient time to organise the purchase of the jumpers needed.

If there are any questions and clarifications needed then please do let me know. As I have mentioned to parents/carers before standards of uniform are important for a whole host of school ethos and good conduct reasons and therefore it is important that our expectations do not become diluted.

Catch-up

Currently we are making preparations for some catch-up provision for students who have fallen behind with work during the lockdown. Teaching staff have been assessing where the shortfalls in terms of work undertaken and completion have been and we will be targeting catch-up classes and other intervention. This will involve setting additional work to be completed at home, some additional classes after school and Saturday mornings and input during school time. It is vitally important for all students (much more so for students in Years 10, 11, 12 and 13) that they undertake much more self-directed catch-up study focusing on any missed work and addressing any gaps in knowledge and understanding. Our expectation is that students in these years particularly adopt a much more proactive role in terms of catching up, drawing on support from our staff as appropriate but taking the lead wherever possible.

We will be commencing our Saturday morning Maths classes for those students in Year 11 soon. Parents of Year 11 students will receive information from the Maths department separately about this in the next few days.

Detentions

After half term we will be exploring the reinstatement of our detention system to manage low level disruption and lack of homework. At the start of term it was difficult to establish our Covid routines and facilitate this key aspect of our expectation reinforcing regime. After half term we believe we can now organise this with confidence.

Front of school

As I write this letter contractors working on the front of school changes are planning on completing the works over the half term break. It is anticipated that the tarmac will be laid during half term and that the front will be operational soon. A reminder to all parents/carers that you will not be able to

enter the school site to drop off and pick- up once the works are finished. I have explained this at length in the past so I am confident that everyone understands the rationale for this.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sunil Chotai', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Sunil Chotai
Headteacher