



2nd February 2021

Dear Parents and carers,

I hope that this letter finds all of you and your families in good health and in an optimistic frame of mind; given the reported national progress with vaccination rollout there should be some room for all of us to feel optimistic at this particularly challenging time.

I am writing to update you on key developments since my last letter of 15th January 2021.

Remote Learning

Thank you to all parents who completed the survey on remote learning. We had 423 responses in all with over 100 from Year 7, 80 from Year 8 and a total of 90 from Years 11, 12 and 13. It was very valuable to go through the analysis of the feedback and to read the considered written comments that parents made about possible improvements. I am grateful to parents for the time they devoted to completing this survey and for their feedback of individual ideas and general perceptions.

Overall, the findings from the survey were positive; the majority (64%) of parents rated their experience of the remote learning provided as being either outstanding or good with another 30% rating their experience as satisfactory. So, 94% rating it as satisfactory or better. The most common issues that came through in the feedback were:

1. Parents would like more teacher led lessons facilitated through MS Teams, they felt that these motivated and engaged students the best.
2. In terms of the amount of work being set, 58% felt that what was being set was about right whilst 27% felt that too much was set by subject staff and that this needed reviewing, the remaining 15% split equally between too little set and not sure. In the comments section a number of parents reported that their children feel overwhelmed and respite from school work would be appreciated.
3. There were several comments about the use of SMHW and Teams and that the use of both these platforms was sometimes confusing.
4. Feedback - a number of parents reported that teacher feedback on students' work was a key motivating factor and that pupils would benefit from more teacher feedback.

As a consequence of this feedback we have discussed at length how we can respond. As a staff team, we spent time during the recent training day discussing aspects of remote learning and decided the following:

1. The frequency of teacher led lessons will increase significantly. Our aim is to ensure that the overwhelming majority of lessons on a student's timetable be delivered via a Teams meeting with their teacher. The goal being to replicate the school classroom experience as far as is possible.

I am sure that parents will appreciate that there will be times when teachers will not be able to conduct live teacher led lessons, for example when they are supervising in school, when illness or family circumstances do not allow, or when it is educationally not appropriate to do so. Nonetheless, you should experience a good increase in the number of live lessons.

2. The amount of work that we set students will be adjusted so that they do not feel overwhelmed and unable to cope. It is understood that away from the school setting some students may feel a bit insecure about the work in hand. The increased frequency of live teacher led lessons, where students are completing work under supervision, will also help in this context.
3. We clarified the expectation that all work, including live lessons, needs to be posted on SMHW. SMHW is to be the platform where all information in relation to work and live lessons is to be logged; this can be awkward for teachers however, we will endeavour to do this so that students feel confident that they are not missing scheduled live lessons. However, it is important for students and parents/carers to note that students should be ready to log into each lesson on their timetable as a live lesson as a matter of course.
4. We clarified our feedback expectations in relation to pupils' work. Teaching staff will identify a minimum of one piece of work per the two-week timetable that students should submit for marking and feedback. This marking and feedback may take different forms on different occasions. For example, detailed marking on a written piece such as an extended written answer, a written piece where a certain aspect is focused on for marking, low stakes tests perhaps in the form of a quiz marked via online learning platform, a feedback lesson recorded to highlight common strengths and weaknesses in a whole classes' work with further time provided for redrafting and improving work. There are many strategies that staff will continue to use in order to keep students motivated and to be made aware of how they are progressing.
5. To build in time in the learning programme for catch-up; times when new work set will be minimal allowing students to catch-up and consolidate.
6. I would just like to clarify for parents that the timetable we are working to is the pandemic amended timetable available on our website. Please note that ShowMyHomework does not pick this up.

We discussed several other issues related to ways of enhancing remote learning; we are confident that pupils will benefit from these and other adjustments. My thanks again to parents who responded to the survey, I hope that you will understand that we cannot take on board every suggestion or idea but we have responded where it is most appropriate.

Public Examinations 2021

Parents/carers of students in Years 11, 12 and 13 will be keen to understand how assessment of grades for this year's public examinations will be undertaken. Whilst we have no definitive answer to this as yet, the Department for Education (DfE) and Ofqual (the exams regulator) have set out a proposal that has just completed its consultation period.

I have summarised some key points from the proposal for parents. My summary only covers key elements and is not exhaustive by any means.

1. This proposal outlines that a significant part of the assessment of the final grade is to be undertaken by class teachers/schools; it is significantly different from the process that we used last summer.

“We propose that in summer 2021 a student’s grade in each subject will be based on their teachers’ assessment of the standard at which the student is performing. In the absence of exams, teachers are best placed to assess the standard at which their student is performing”

2. School assessed grades are to be based on “the standard at which a student is performing”, rather than on what they would have been able to achieve had there not been a pandemic.

“We propose grades this year should be based on teachers’ assessments of the evidence of the standard at which their students are performing; it should indicate their demonstrated knowledge, understanding and skills. This is important given that the grades will be indistinguishable from grades issued by exam boards in other years. The exam boards that will issue the results need to be confident the grades are justifiable. Teachers should assess students on the areas of content they have covered and can demonstrate their ability, while ensuring sufficient breadth of content coverage so as not to limit progression”

3. Exam boards will provide assessment material/papers which may - or must - be used by schools. They will be marked by teachers in the school.

“We propose that the exam boards should use in their papers, questions that are similar in style and format to those in normal exam papers. This means that the sorts of questions used will be familiar to students, who typically use past papers to help them prepare for their exams. The exam boards might use a combination of questions from past papers and new questions to develop their papers.

The nature of the papers set by the exam boards will need to be appropriate for the subject. Students must be given opportunities to show what they can do. For example, a student who was working towards a high grade in GCSE mathematics must be given the opportunity to show they could perform to a standard associated with that grade”.

Exam boards would create a menu of papers from which teachers/schools would choose from. All students would be expected to complete the assessment papers for a

particular subject within a certain time frame to ensure that leaks do not advantage or disadvantage some.

4. For each candidate in each subject a range of evidence/data will be assembled by schools. The marked assessment material mentioned above will be an important part of this, it may even be the main part given that we will have limited other information. The principle is that we would use evidence from:
 - a. Formal tests - as above
 - b. Mock exams
 - c. Other substantial candidate work that relates to the subject specification and which the school is confident represents the candidate's **own** knowledge and understanding - i.e. it has been completed without help or support.
5. Taking the full range of evidence as a whole, the teacher will propose an overall grade. Exam boards will check on the methods which schools are using to reach their decisions. They will also sample individual evidence.
6. Once the exam board is satisfied that the process has been fair and consistent, candidates will be told their grades. If a candidate believes their work has been graded wrongly, they may appeal.
7. The school will then appoint a person to reassess the evidence concerned. This may result in the grade going up or down.
8. A further appeal would also be possible. This would be to the exam board and would not involve the individual candidate's evidence of work, but a check on whether the school had followed the correct procedures throughout.

As I say, this proposal has just finished consultation and we await confirmation of the final process to be used. Parents/carers and students will need to understand that this proposal aims for the use of exam board set papers to support the assessment of the final grade for GCSE, AS and A level.

It is therefore obviously vital that all students attend remote lessons fully and prepare thoroughly, knowing that these tests and teacher assessments more generally will be undertaken systematically and will determine final grades. The assessed grades will need to be supported by sound evidence of a candidate's performance in class and in tests and this will be moderated by the examination boards.

Parents' Evenings and Year 8 Options

So far this academic year we have hosted two virtual parents' evenings, the most recent with Year 11 using the Parent Cloud software. The feedback from staff and parents has been good, all reporting that given the context the meetings have gone as well as can be expected. My thanks to all parents involved with this for their support with these arrangements.

Next on the schedule of parents' meetings we have the Year 8 parents' evening, appointments for these are well under way using the same process as for Year 11. Hopefully these meetings will also go well.

Looking ahead further we will soon also need to organise and facilitate a Year 8 options evening. This options evening is going to be more complicated than usual obviously if we have to undertake it virtually. Having missed so much schooling over the last year, our Year 8 students will not be in the best position to make option choices and the whole option process could be very difficult this year. We are currently planning to delay the options process as much as is practically possible to help with decision making. We are also planning for additional support for students and families who many need extra guidance and direction. Under normal working conditions individual student/subject staff discussion would occur naturally in school and this would play an important part in children making appropriate option choices, this year we may need to facilitate these conversations in a more contrived fashion. More information on Year 8 options will come out to you in due course.

School Reopening Update

I am sure that many of you have picked up on the Prime Minister's recent statement regarding school closures.

All parents and carers will agree that it has been awkward managing and dealing with a range of pandemic related issues when decisions taken in government have been communicated to us at the last minute. This time therefore we are grateful and pleased that we now have at least some certainty about what will be happening in the coming weeks. The key announcements from the PM in parliament outline the following:

- The **earliest** schools might 'begin to re-open' will be Monday 8th March, which is the start of the third school week after the half-term holiday.
- There will be a plan/review set out on Monday 22nd February (the first day after the half-term holiday), with further updates.
- When the decision to return has been made, schools will get two weeks' notice of this.

Sadly, this means that we have a number of weeks of home learning under the current arrangements. I know that this will be bitterly disappointing for many families and the children, but I hope that it provides some hope that there might be an end in sight, at least in terms of getting the children back into school.

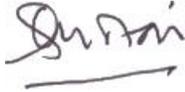
We also received clarification from the Department for Education yesterday that schools would not be asked to open over half-term for children of critical workers. You may recall that we were asked if we could do this during the first lockdown.

LFD Testing

As things stand in terms of government guidance, all children returning to school will be asked to undergo a lateral flow device test in school. This is obviously going to be a significant undertaking for over 1300 children. After suspending work on the mass testing aspect of this work in early January it is our intention to rekindle this in the coming weeks so that we are ready as soon as the decision to open schools is taken.

Parents will be aware that we have been undertaking these LFD tests for children attending the key worker provision and for staff twice per week. The arrangements for this have worked well and our next task will be to scale this up considerably.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sunil Chotai', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Sunil Chotai
Headteacher