



Charles Darwin School

Operated by the Charles Darwin Academy Trust

Headteacher: Sunil Chotai, BSc

24th April 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Students,

As we commence week three of the enforced school closure I hope that all of you are well and keeping safe, working on school work set and adhering to the government guidance.

We would this week have commenced our summer term, a term that usually involves all of us enjoying the improving weather and working our way towards the end of year examinations and the enrichment activities. Alas this year things will be different. I hope that you are doing your bit at home to ensure that life for your families is as positive as can be given the difficulties of being cooped up together for so long. At times like these it is important for us to be resilient and thoughtful, making sure that we look after each other's physical and mental wellbeing.

Parents will be aware that in school we would usually do an assembly for students that would help students reflect on a moral or spiritual theme. In the absence of such an assembly I am hoping that I can ask parents and students to read and discuss the reflections below.

Last week (Friday 17th April) was the 50th anniversary of the near disaster on the Apollo 13 space craft. I can still remember, vividly, as a young boy who was fascinated with all things related to space travel, watching live proceedings on our black and white TV as events from this ill-fated space mission unfolded. When the words "Houston, we've have a problem here" were spoken by the astronaut Jack Swigert the whole world's attention turned upwards towards outer space as the drama developed in front of a watching world.

Some of you may know that the planned Apollo 13 moon landing mission had to be aborted after the on-board oxygen tank exploded as the space craft made its way to the moon. Instead of landing on the moon the space craft had to loop around the moon and return to Earth, a journey that took several days.

It was on 17th April 1970, 50 years ago, that the command module entered Earth's atmosphere, and splashed down in the South Pacific Ocean. The return had been as they say touch and go, the space craft almost did not make it back and there was real sense that the lives of the three astronauts might be lost in the live minute by minute broadcasts shared across the globe.

What I find remarkable about the accounts of what took place during the efforts to return the crew safely to Earth was not so much the innovation and ingenuity that was required, but more the fact that the crew is reported not to have complained about their predicament. Conditions on board had become hostile to life: it was freezing cold, impossible to rest and there was the constant fear of a lonely death. That's where character becomes important. How can I assess a situation by facing reality and calmly keep moving forward?

I came across a story recently where an experienced soldier (who had served in the military for many years) described giving some advice to a young soldier who was afraid of the minesweeping task that lay before him. His words to the soldier have stuck with me: how can I find the path and not the obstacles? Sometimes that's easier said than done, but we need to be able to do this so that we can be inspired and lifted out of some pretty horrendous challenges. It's telling that the Apollo 13 astronauts' last words before re-entry were directed at mission control: "I know all of us here want to thank all of you guys down there for the very fine job you did."

In my view it all comes down to maintaining the right attitude and thinking realistically but also optimistically, and that's our collective challenge and opportunity in this present crisis.

Let us all set each other the correct example that will help shape our attitude now in this massive challenge that we all face together. This hopefully will keep us from complaining and ensure that we help each other find the path ahead with clarity and calmness.

Some notices for parents and students:

Work Set

This week staff have recommenced setting work for all classes. I would just like to again remind you of a few points about the work.

1. **It is really important that all students attempt the work set by staff and return it when asked to do so by their teachers.** The longer this lockdown goes on for the greater the chances are that your progress and exam results will be affected if you don't undertake the work to the best of your ability. **So your engagement is essential.** If there are any serious access issues then please do let me know via the schoolclosure@cdarwin.com email address.
2. Well done to all of you who have been working diligently on the work set by staff. As I said in my last message I am sorry it is not possible to send all the work back to your teachers. So make sure you keep hold of your work, organise it as best as you can and when school reopens we will ask you to bring it in. Please remember the point of the work you are doing is to improve your knowledge and understanding, it is not just to please your teachers and keep them off your back.
3. Paper based work – if you need to pick up paper based work, the next batch for all subjects will be available to collect from Friday 24th April from main school reception between 9.00am and 12 noon. Monday-Friday
4. Please don't worry if you can't complete all of the work set, but please do try and have a really good go at all that is set.
5. Please remember following Ofqual guidance and my recent letter to parents of Year 11, 12 and 13 students – we will not be setting more work going towards this year's assessment of GCSE, AS and A level examinations.

Free School Meals

Families who are eligible for free school meals should have received an email from the government's voucher distributors Edenred with their voucher code. From now on this

voucher method will replace the school's own system for dealing with free school meals that involved a cash transfer. If there are issues with the distribution of these vouchers then please do contact our Finance Officer (wev@cdarwin.com) directly or email the schoolclosure@cdarwin.com email.

Scheduled parent's evenings and reports

This term we have a number of parent's evenings and reports scheduled. Obviously under the circumstances of the school closure we will not be able to proceed with these as planned.

Online safety and safeguarding guidance

We have issued, on our school website, guidance for families in relation to ensuring online safety at these tricky times. I would encourage all parents to read this and of course implement as they see appropriate for their own children.

The following links are now available via the main page of the school website (School closure Guidance and Information for children and parents/carers):

- Helplines for children and parents during school closure
- Support for victims of Domestic Abuse
- Support for parents and carers to keep children safe on line April 2020

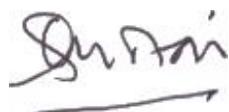
Children will be encouraged to email their Achievement Co-ordinator or Pastoral Manager if they have concerns about their own mental health or the mental health of another child at this testing time. This will be encouraged by the relevant year group newsletters that are being emailed home. Likewise, if parents/carers have a concern about their own child's mental health, please could they email the relevant ACo as referrals and phone conversations with some of our school counsellors can be arranged via our School Counsellor, Mrs King. Bromley Wellbeing remains available for phone referrals and the helpline sheet on the school website has various on line support services.

Fraud Risk

Sadly, periods of instability, such as during the current coronavirus pandemic, bring an increased risk of fraud. Fraudsters will actively exploit these difficult times and will target vulnerable areas for financial gain. We have been informed by the Department for Education that some learners and parents have received a letter from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) asking for personal learner bank details in relation to the 16-19 Bursary Fund. Please can parents note that the ESFA would never ask for personal bank account details. This is a fraudulent letter – please do not respond.

If any parents have concerns during these unprecedented times please do let me know via the dedicated email account: schoolclosure@cdarwin.com.

Yours sincerely,



Sunil Chotai
Headteacher