



11 May 2021

Dear Parents/Carers

Since starting as Headteacher in January and going straight into another lockdown for over two months, I have had time to take stock of what makes The Castle School such a special place and to consider our next steps. There is no doubt the last year has had and will have a profound effect on us all. Students have had a whole year of disruption to their learning. Year 8 students have been particularly affected, with one third of their whole secondary school life spent at home learning online (or in school for the vulnerable students and children of critical workers).

The COVID situation and the long-term impact on learning has made us review the school's curriculum and how best we can realise the school's vision through the delivery of it. The foundation knowledge covered in the Key Stage Three is very important; it sets up the key concepts, vocabulary and knowledge for future learning. We know that if the building blocks of knowledge are not in place this can be a significant barrier to future learning. The National Curriculum provides students with an introduction to the essential knowledge they need to be educated citizens, making sense of the world and finding their place in it. It introduces them to the best that has been thought and said, and helps engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.

We need to act with integrity, to ensure we give your child the knowledge they need to succeed in the future. We are recovering from a worldwide pandemic and we must respond to what we are seeing and what students are telling us, to ensure students do well, not just for their GCSEs, but as they move into their adult lives.

Whilst we know your child made their 'Choices' in January, many students have since asked if they can change these, particularly with practical subjects. We feel this is mainly because students did not get the same experience of these subjects online as they would have done being in school, with their teachers. Whilst engagement and participation in online lessons was exceptional in lock down, it has become apparent that some of the knowledge has not been deeply learned. We want to reduce students' anxiety around this and are listening to what they are saying and know we now need to give them more time studying the breadth of subjects they have in Year 8 as they move into Year 9.

Following a review of the curriculum with Governors, there will be some changes to your child's curriculum which means the Greater Depth 'choices' curriculum will not go ahead for September 2021. Your child will continue into Year 9 with the broad curriculum they currently study, so that when they come to make their GCSE option choices part way through Year 9, they have had a rich experience and can make properly informed decisions. When students move into Year 10, they will study three GCSE option choices, alongside their 5 or 6 core GCSE subjects. This will ensure they have more time in these subjects and, therefore, giving more time for success. This is the same curriculum as Year 11 have currently. As well as these changes, we intend to support this year group with smaller class sizes where possible.

Your child has had an assembly today explaining the changes. There will be an information session for parents/carers held online on Thursday 20 May at 6.00 pm, details on how to access the session will follow.

Yours sincerely

Mr Lamb