

18 May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers of Year 10

As you will have heard, the government has announced that it hopes schools will be able to invite more students into the physical building from 1 June 'at the earliest'. The government guidance (at the time of writing) states:

'We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in [the UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy](#) are operating effectively. As a result, we are asking schools, colleges and childcare providers to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.'

It goes on to say:

'We will ask secondary schools, sixth form and further education colleges to offer some face-to-face support to supplement the remote education of Year 10 and Year 12 students who are due to take key exams next year, alongside the full time provision they are offering to priority groups.'

As you can see, this is very cautious. I feel that some Year 10 students will be understandably excited by the prospect of returning to school and may be disappointed by the reality. We have to weigh up the risk to your child and your family, and there is evidence on both sides, suggesting that this is far from clear cut as yet. I desperately want our students back in school, but not at the cost of their safety or staff safety. Certainly, the notion that all students will return to school as it was before, with break and lunchtime, social times, Sports and PE etc, is impossible until the virus is under far greater control than currently. My priority is the safety of your children and our staff. I am also very aware that Year 10 in particular are anxious about missing school, about the GCSEs next year, and missing the social contact that we all need, but especially teenagers as part of their maturation and growing up. At the end of this letter are some helplines if you need support, and school is always there and continues to provide pastoral care for our students.

At the moment, I can only say that Year 10 are the year group I and the staff at The Castle School are most concerned about and any plans to bring more children in will be giving them priority regardless of what anyone else says. We are currently exploring ways that we can give more small group tutorials online and, if we can guarantee safety, to bring some students into school where their teachers feel they can provide a safe environment and that where this will have a significant impact on those students' ability to progress.

Those of you whose children have taken part in the live-streaming pilot have fed back very positively and we will be opening that up now for more lessons, and to ensure that students who are not able to access the live-stream can still benefit from hearing the discussion. TEAMS has significantly improved our ability to teach online, I feel, and as we move forwards, we will be using TEAMS more frequently although all work will continue to be set initially on ShowMyHomework so that we keep things simple and everyone can access the

work. I am very aware that some students have to access work on their phones and this is not as easy as on a laptop or PC, and that many students are sharing computers with siblings or parents who have to work online. We are doing our best although sometimes that is not good enough to really maintain progress.

If at all possible, we will be aiming to introduce some face-to-face time with Year 10s. I would like to extend that to other year groups of course but I think the situation is so tenuous that it is really one step at a time. The last thing anyone wants is another spike in the virus rates, and none of us want to see that in our own community so we will proceed with caution but with the intention that we do invite Year 10s in when and if it is safe to do so.

I do feel that the exam boards for GCSEs will have to recognise the impact of Covid-19 on the current Year 10. At the moment, all their focus is on the award for the current Year 11 but I am confident that Headteachers will be successful in pressurising them and I think this will be acknowledged by exam boards once the Year 11 awards are completed.

Best wishes and stay safe
Mrs Watson

Support and Wellbeing

SHARE@sompar.nhs.uk is available to support you.

<http://www.emotionintelligence.co.uk> has lots of advice supporting parents

'Mindline Somerset '01823 276 892 open 8-11pm Tues, Wed, Fri-Sun here for people in distress in Somerset, now taking calls for Under 18s.