

20 April 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I hope that my letter finds you well after Easter and during the current circumstances. A small group of QE students and staff continued to attend school during the two week holiday and our provision for children of key workers, vulnerable and EHCP students continues at Hexham Middle School. Despite the fact that we continue to educate mostly in the virtual world, I thought it timely at the start of a new term to write to you with various pieces of important information and updates.

Online Learning

Curriculum leaders and teachers have been reviewing the first stages of our online learning that led up to Easter and they are now ensuring that any new or additional content is available for this half term. We are trying to stick to the in-school curriculum as best we can during the lockdown so that students can eventually return to school ready to continue to make progress. The gateway for the online learning can still be found on the website and the majority of subjects are communicating using Moodle. Now we are several weeks into this new way of working I must emphasise how important it is that students complete the work that they are being set. We will be contacting home where it is clear that little or no work has been completed. I am mindful that there are a range of potential issues challenging families at the moment and do not want to exacerbate anxiety or put undue pressure where problems exist. However, I still have a duty to ensure that parents and carers are aware if work is not being undertaken and there is a risk of their child falling behind.

A small number of parents / carers indicated in the initial survey several weeks ago that online learning would not be possible due to a lack of internet or technology at home. The pastoral leaders for each year group have been sending work to these students in the post and we will be in touch with a system for safely returning work for teacher feedback. Mrs Minto, Assistant Headteacher for teaching and learning, is coordinating this approach. We have had some additional requests for hard copies of work to be posted out from some families who had not originally indicated that there was an issue in the survey. Again, this will be managed by our pastoral leaders for each year group on a case by case basis, but can I emphasise to parents / carers that we can only do this for families where there is a genuine practical need. I am sure you understand that we cannot post out hard copies of work to the entire student body in the current circumstances.

Supportive guidance from the government

Given the continuation of the current lockdown, the government have provided some additional support and guidance for parents: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/supporting-your-childrens-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19?utm_source=cab989cd-0d5a-4ac7-9145-6445159c785f&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate

They have also been updating their FAQs for parents and carers, which includes links to resources to support the wellbeing and mental health of young people, recognising that such a drastic change in their lives and routines has the potential to have a significant detrimental impact:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

Grades for GCSEs, A Levels and vocational courses

The government recently released information on how results will be awarded for the summer exam series. For GCSE, A Level, AS Level (Year 12 further maths) and Year 13 BTEC/OCR, schools have been asked to give each student a predicted grade and rank the students within those grades. Miss Platts and Miss Innes have reviewed this guidance and will be leading curriculum leaders and teachers in this process, giving all students a holistic professional judgement that balances different sources of evidence. There will then be a national standardisation process after we submit the school predicted grades. Please see the letter from the DfE for students and parents for more information:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/878854/Letter_to_students_-_Summer_2020_grading.pdf

The government has stated that results will be published on Thursday 13th August for Year 13 and Thursday 20th August for Year 11; these would have been the results days had the students sat exams this year. The government is currently consulting on an appeal and 'resit' process for after results.

As far as Year 10 and Year 12 are concerned, there is a current consultation as to whether predictions will be provided for the BTEC and OCR exams they would typically do during the summer series. We will write to you with the result of the consultation once the guidance is published.

The instructions in the government guidance are clear that schools cannot share predictions or rankings with students or parents / carers. This is to protect the integrity of the teachers' judgements, and to avoid teachers, curriculum leaders or Heads of Centre feeling under pressure to submit a grade that is not supported by appropriate evidence. Please note: although we were due to publish predicted grades for Y11 and Y13 in accordance with our in-school calendar, we now cannot, as this would also compromise the new process we are undertaking.

Free school meals update

For the first two weeks of school closure, we provided all families entitled to free school meals with a gift card to be used at Co-operative Food supermarkets.

A government-led national scheme was brought in from 6th April 2020. This enables us to issue parents with an eCode that they can exchange for an eGiftcard for their preferred supermarket each week. We have encountered a number of issues and delays with the system for ordering eCodes over the last two weeks, but all codes should now have been emailed to parents for the two weeks of the Easter holidays. Although some parents have successfully redeemed their eGiftcards, we are aware that other parents have experienced some difficulties, which we are currently investigating.

The order for the vouchers for week commencing 20th April 2020 was placed last week and we are now waiting for the eCodes to be sent to parents by Edenred. These should be received soon.

Please note that these vouchers are only being sent to parents whose children aren't currently attending school – children in school will continue to receive free meals each day.

If your financial circumstances have changed, you may be eligible to apply for free school meals. This can be done by submitting a claim to Northumberland County council as follows:

- **Online** www.northumberland.gov.uk/fsm
- **By telephone** 01670 623 592
- **Paper applications** – these can be returned upon completion to: Free School Meals Office, Northumberland County Council, Wansbeck Square, Ashington, NE63 9XL

Returning to school

You may be aware that there has been a lot of speculation in the media about when schools will re-open, with some reports suggesting as soon as three weeks' time. In response to this, the DfE tweeted late on Saturday night that "No decision has been made on a timetable for re-opening schools. Schools remain closed until further notice, except for children of critical workers and the most vulnerable children. Schools will only re-open when the scientific advice indicates it is the right time to do so." This was followed by more information from Gavin Williamson in Sunday's government briefing. The Secretary of State detailed five tests that the country would need to meet before schools could get "back to normal". You can find these [here](#).

The Secretary of State was clear that we can think about getting more children into schools and colleges again only when the country has met these five essential points. He committed to working with the sector to consider how best to reopen schools when the time comes. I shall write to you as and when the situation becomes clearer.

I shall leave it at this for now other than to send all good wishes to you, your child and wider family and to thank you for your continued support.

Yours faithfully



James Andriot
Head of school