

Keeping our school community safe

Our school and sixth form have now been closed since the end of March as part of the national response to the Coronavirus pandemic. There is much speculation at the moment about how schools may start to increasingly bring more students back to the classroom before the summer break. Attention is focused on year groups 10 and 12. These are the students who are due to sit their external examinations in 2021. The concerns of parents and teachers of students in these two year groups are well founded and understood.

School leaders and governing bodies are being asked to consider the most appropriate, local response and the Department of Education has issued broad guidelines to help schools to make these decisions. We have carried out a risk assessment and a review of the potential benefits to students being in school. **With the exception** of some of our most vulnerable students, those using our Key Workers Club, and in very specific cases where targeted interventions have been identified as essential, **school will not reopen before September 2020.**

In considering the best course of action at HCCS, maintaining the safety of everyone in our school community has been the overwhelming priority as we consider what the potential educational benefits there may be in inviting some students and staff members to return to the classrooms, over the course of the next few weeks. What is very clear, is that the impact of social distancing guidance on the delivery of the school day and the lack of school transport, will make it impossible to reinstate anything that resembles a normal timetable or lesson structure. Therefore, in the short term, we need to be very clear that any plans to invite students back to school are very much based on achieving some educational benefit that cannot be achieved in any other way.

We are therefore very clear at this stage, that we are not developing any plans to invite all students in current year groups 10 and 12 back to school before September 2020. The school's senior leadership team do not believe that a blanket return of all students in these year groups will have any significant educational benefit and therefore, the potential to compromise their safety and that of school staff cannot be justified. In a very small number of cases, there could be some advantage in inviting

them to attend school for a short period of intervention, but this will be very focused and unlikely to exceed a few hours at a time during the first three weeks of July.

During the period of school closure, the strategy adopted here at Holmes Chapel Comprehensive School has very much been around the development of supported home learning. This has been very successful so far but now needs to be evaluated and further developed. With particular regard to the year groups 10 and 12, our strategy at this point is to increase the opportunity for face to face contact between students and their teachers, not all of which will require sharing the same space. Some live lessons have now commenced for students in year 12 which have been very well received and have resulted in significant progress being made. The plans for the rest of this school year involve extending this method of learning, increasing the face to face contact between students and teachers in years 10 and 12. The key to success will depend both on the quality of live lessons and on the engagement of students with live, remote lessons and other learning opportunities.

There are clear and understandable concerns expressed by parents and teachers about the disproportionate impact the school closure has had on these students who will face their external examinations next summer. HCCS is committed to doing everything possible to prepare students for this crucial part of their learning journey. With this in mind, The focus of online learning, including live lessons, will be on the delivery of large parts of the curriculum and to formally assess the current level of learning for every student. Working with students and families of year 10 and 12, we will design support packages to help bridge the gap between where learners are now and where they need to be by the end of 2020. We have already launched transition units of learning for year 11 students who will step up to their next level of learning after the summer break, which has been helpful in clarifying our thoughts on developing bridging units.

There will continue to be uncertainty about the timing and logistical arrangements to make a safe return to school possible for all students and this is highly likely to remain the case during the rest of 2020. We are therefore convinced that time spent now on developing and improving on the delivery of online learning, supported by live lessons and targeted time in school will give the greatest gains while also supporting the safety of our whole school community. We will plan and design learning in consultation with parents, students and teachers.

Work is underway on the risk assessment of our school buildings in order to facilitate the implementation of the safe systems and processes needed to keep our school community safe in the longer term. It would be unrealistic to think that the world will have returned to anything that we would previously have defined as normal, before September 2020. We must be in a position to fully understand and deliver a safe working and learning environment while making sure that the quality and range of education that we provide is of the highest standards.

We will be carrying out a range of consultation exercises over the next two months to get everyone's views, staff, students and parents, about the steps required not just to make our school as safe as possible, but also take into consideration the additional steps we may need to take in order to give everyone the confidence to return to school. The safety of everyone in our school community must be our priority.

Please contact us by email to educationathome@hccs.info in the first instance if you have any comments or questions