

Our Ref: DWt/LPu

22nd January 2021

Dear Parent/Carers,

Another week of live lessons has been and gone and I hope most of the initial issues have been ironed out. It is never going to be perfect but we are here to support as best we can. Quite an eventful week at Woodlands, as ever, and I trust all is going well. As with any new system there will always be things that we can do better and all thoughts and suggestions from you, your youngsters, and staff have been greatly appreciated.

Remote Learning

A fantastic effort from all staff and our youngsters over the last two weeks, and as with anything we reflect to see how we can improve the learning experience. Much of last week was spent gathering feedback from you, our youngsters and the teaching staff. As a result, from next week there will be some slight tweaks.

Our main aim, when making the decision to switch to five live lessons a day, was to ensure our youngsters' remote provision mirrored their normal school experience as much as possible. Of course, there will be certain elements we cannot recreate. We are all missing the daily interaction with our young people and, when we cannot read the room, it is difficult to adapt the teaching in the way we would normally, however it is the nearest we can get in the circumstances.

I am sure you can appreciate that some staff will be unwell on occasion, or have unavoidable appointments, so there may be the odd lesson that just cannot be delivered live. As with anything life sometimes gets in the way.

The feedback I have received to date is that live lessons offer our young people a positive learning experience and our engagement is at the highest it has ever been during lockdown. We are still working to ensure our youngsters attend all lessons, submit work to show understanding and are continuing to work hard. Teachers are keen to offer feedback, in line with the school's Feedback Policy, and it is consequently essential that all are 'turning in' their work to ensure we can address misconceptions and secure progress.

We have been training teams of staff to be making contact with those who haven't been attending the live lessons or who have not been 'turning in' the work, to identify the reasons for this and see if any further support is needed. These staff will be known as the Remote Learning Support team (RLS), not especially catchy but key in explaining their role, and not to be confused with the Boy Band JLS!

The bigger picture

Our expectations and standards still remain high as we know you would not want to have it any other way. We all want the best for our youngsters and if we lower these expectations the youngsters ultimately will be worse off in the long run. Those additional staff making contact will be there to help resolve any issues and ensure you are well informed with the solutions that have been agreed. This will allow our curriculum to continue and alleviate any need for additional catch-up work when we return; putting our young people in the best position to make the progress they deserve and achieve their potential.

We are guilty, as a school, of occasionally caring too much and 'spoon-feeding' our youngsters. Given AROE drives everything we do, we are constantly looking to promote Resilience and ensure we create young people who will thrive in any situation. Whilst our current situation is challenging, it is certainly providing an opportunity for all to demonstrate independence and develop a growth mind-set necessary for success in later life.

Tutor time from Tuesday 26th January

I am aware that many emails and conversations have been had both this week and last as we aim to keep the engagement as high as it can be. Moving forward we have tweaked the processes for a little more clarity:

- Those few youngsters who have been flagged as either not attending virtual live lessons or not 'turning in' work for multiple lessons will need to attend a virtual meeting with their form tutor at 8.30am. They will need to wait in the remote lobby until their tutor welcomes them in for a one-to-one meeting (please be aware, depending on the number involved, they may need to wait for 10 mins until their tutor is ready to see them, but this will ensure individual needs are addressed and an action plan is agreed moving forward).
- **On Monday 25th, all pupils will be given a 'fresh start' with their online learning and only be expected to catch up missed work from that date forward as we recognise in the first couple of weeks, some have had genuine technical issues, which have now, in the main, been resolved.**
- A text will be sent the night before the meeting to you to confirm details of this. Please do not contact the school straight away as the purpose of the meeting the next morning will be to deal with these issues.
- A member of the Remote Learning Support (RLS) team will call home for the tutor groups they are supporting to share information about what was discussed during the tutor meeting and discuss the solution/action plan agreed. For example, if the discussion was about not 'turning in' their work they will be asked to catch up with the work and then for the youngster to email their subject teacher to confirm missed work is completed. **Whilst work remains outstanding, our youngsters will continue to be asked to attend daily one-to-one meetings with their tutor to ensure they are on track to catch up and to address any further issues that have been identified. This should support all and ensure they do not have outstanding work building up, the stress of which, we are concerned may negatively impact their wellbeing.**
- At 8.50am all will be expected to attend a virtual tutor session for a quick catch-up and share any messages. A register will be taken at this time so we can ensure all our youngsters are ready for the day ahead.

Live lessons

I have had feedback that some of our youngsters are struggling with the amount of time spent sat in front of a screen. As a result, **from Monday 25th January** we have recommended they adjust their lesson planning accordingly. The first 10 mins of the lesson, our young people will have a memory retrieval activity displayed on the screen to attempt before the main learning activity takes place. This allows all a couple of minutes to deal with any technical issues, use the toilet, get a drink etc. before attempting the memory retrieval task. The following 40 minutes of the lesson will be teacher led and will be where the main activity for the lesson. The learning will finish 10 minutes before the end of the lesson to allow them the time to check understanding, 'turn in' their work and ask any questions they may have.

To summarise:

First 10 minutes

- Chance to settle and get organised whilst there being a memory retrieval starter up to complete. This will not take the full ten minutes as explained above

Middle 40 minutes

- Discuss learning objectives
- New content will be delivered
- Task/s to complete where new knowledge is gathered and applied

Final 10 minutes

- Plenary and time to 'turn in' and have a break before the next lesson

As you will appreciate, not all lessons will follow this exact format but we will ensure that time is set aside for them to 'turn in' their work and stretch their legs. As with teaching on a normal school day, it is up to each member of staff as to how they teach their lessons and I trust my staff to have professional autonomy to ensure their youngsters make progress. Of course, all staff will work within certain parameters, but teaching techniques may differ according to the subject, topic and who they are teaching. After all, if we were all to teach in exactly the same way it would become a little boring!

Exams update

We are still awaiting the outcome of the consultation which opened last week. Whilst nothing has yet to be confirmed, the following has been included in the proposal:

- Teachers provide replacement grades
- Evidence could include coursework, essays, tests and homework
- External tests set by exam boards, but likely to be marked in school
- Results early July
- Vocational exams will use teachers' grades, but separate arrangements for practical skills
- Two-week consultation before any final decision

Timescale proposal:

- To be assessed by teachers in a period beginning in May into early June
- Teachers would submit grades to the exam boards by mid-June
- External quality assurance by the exam boards ongoing throughout June
- Results would be issued once the Quality Assurance process is complete, most likely in early July
- Pupil appeals could be submitted immediately following the issue of results and would first be considered by schools and colleges

Year 11 Parents' Evening

Due to the consultation on what will be happening with regard to the GCSE exam replacement, it will no surprise to you to hear that we will be putting back our Parents' Evening which was due to take place on January 28th.



It makes more sense to have detailed information about what is happening next before we can sit down, all be it virtually, to have a proper conversation with subject teachers on what needs to happen. We are proposing a date in March but we need to wait for some clarity from the Department for Education before we can confirm this.

Testing centre

We had one positive case in Year 7 on Tuesday so as a precaution we sent all in the year group bubble home to self-isolate for ten days, approximately twenty youngsters. It was the first day the youngster had been in and he is doing well. The pupil had a Lateral Flow Test on entry to the school and all were notified by 9.15am.

As I wrote last week, there is some conflicting advice regarding the use of Lateral Flow Tests. The government have yet to decide if they want us to use serial testing as an alternative to self-isolation for those who have been identified as a 'close contact'. Regardless, the government has recommended we continue to mass test staff and pupils in school to identify asymptomatic cases. Given we have the capacity and volunteers to help, we have consequently decided that we will test all pupils taking advantage of our in school provision on a weekly basis. This may not be possible when all pupils return, but we will await further guidance from the government and communicate this with you as we hear.

Moving forward

Inevitably, as with any new system there may have been some confusion for parents and pupils at points this week, but we hope the changes we have made will continue to improve our online learning provision. Please click on the link below to see the short video presentation for parents and carers which outlines clearly our online learning provision and how you can best support your youngsters, [Mr Wright - Supporting Online Learning](#). There are occasions where you just have to say, 'that didn't quite work, let's pause, reflect and make changes that will work even better.' We have consequently perfected our system whilst ensuring our standards remain high and our expectations for learning continue to be driven by Aspiration, Resilience, Opportunity and Excellence.

I managed to get some reading done one evening this week and came across a quote I quite liked from the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, well I am a history teacher!

'When you are stressed by an external thing, it's not the thing itself that troubles, but only your judgement of it. And you can wipe this out at a moment's notice.'

Something for us all to think about.

Very best wishes to you all,

Mr David Wright
Head Teacher