



24 November 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to explain some of the decisions the school has made recently regarding the continuing COVID-19 pandemic situation and how it is affecting the school. In the spirit of transparency, I also want to share my thinking, so you fully understand why we have done what we have done. I am doing this, not necessarily so you agree with me, more so that you understand the many factors I have to consider.

I will start with an apology; for not writing to you sooner last week. My delay is down to waiting to hear back from, two further COVID-19 test results in Y10 and the West Yorkshire Health Protection Team (WYHPT). To date, we have the results back, but I have yet to receive communications from WYHPT.

I appreciate that the virus does not affect young people the same as others and it is mostly a low risk illness for younger people. My largest concerns are them catching it and taking it home and my staff catching it. We have had a significant increase in cases in recent days, leaving me no other choice than to collapse the Y10 bubble and send them home for a 14-day self-isolation period. A decision I am sad to have taken. Particularly, given the efforts we took to remain open this time last year, when norovirus was circulating in Leeds, and other schools closed for up to a week. I have always maintained that if we *can* open, even if partially, we must.

You will have read in the last few weeks, about the hundreds of schools across the country in a similar situation to us. In that they are having to send home thousands of students to self-isolate. We are not unique. Having said that, I know sending students home is causing some frustrations at home. Therefore, I want to address a number of concerns that you, as parents, have brought to our attention as a school:

- Any decision to send a student home has been taken after consultation with the Trust Operations Team, the Department of Education and Public Health England. I follow the national guidance as published by the Government.
- We have our own 'track and trace system' in school, that continues at weekends and throughout the holidays, so we can inform you as soon as possible, allowing you to protect your child and, for some, protect your other family members. If we are in any doubt regarding close or proximity contact between a confirmed case and another child, we err on the side of caution.
- We confirm cases, contacts or self-isolation via the school app and then follow up with a letter to you. Where necessary, we also telephone you to discuss close contacts, or advise you of additional measures you could take to minimise transmission.
- In all cases so far, infection outbreaks have been sourced in the community and not in school. This is important to remember as some parents have raised the point regarding us moving from zoned learning in half-term 1, to specialist teaching spaces in half-term 2. Please remember, Year groups remain in bubbles.

Any infections in school have been within bubbles and have not been transmitted between bubbles. Children do not mix between year groups at any point in the school day, except to say that between lessons they may pass each other on corridors wearing masks. As I have previously explained to you, the official PHE research on transmission during passing, for a brief period of time, whilst wearing a mask is minimal. From my perspective, the longer-term damage to children's livelihood and wellbeing as adults, by not allowing them to study in their specialist classrooms is greater. The purpose of this school is to educate young people so that they have better life chances as adults. Without the chance to complete necessary learning, assessments and prepare for examinations in a specialist classroom undermines this longer-term view. The whole COVID situation in schools is about balance. I cannot further jeopardise students' chances of gaining meaningful qualifications that will transform their lives when they are adults.

- On the consideration of remote learning. Many of you have requested 'live lessons' and stated that 'all other schools are doing them'. They are not. The reality is, some are, and some are not. We have researched the best approach for our remote learning offer, consulting with many schools and other trusts and taken on board the DfE preferred guidance published by the EEF. I cannot find any compelling evidence that remote learning is best delivered by 'live' lessons. Therefore, we have taken the 'mixed economy' decision that these will be done where appropriate with Post 16 learning only. We will not be providing 'live lessons' at this point for Years 7-11.

Other than the lack of evidence to support its effectiveness, I will share some other considerations. At present, I do not have the resources to purchase a remote camera and microphone for every classroom in the school. I do not have the resources nor staffing to operate a camera in each classroom. We have invested heavily in recent years in a number of online learning platforms. All integrated in to our established Class Charts system. These include: Hegarty Maths; GCSE Pod and Tassomai. These are familiar platforms for our students to work with and have been in use for several years. We need to utilise our existing systems of learning, that we know work well for us before complicating matters with new systems, not necessarily designed for educational use, such as MS TEAMS.

I also have to consider safeguarding my staff. Allowing their images to be shared in their public domain, without a guarantee of every student being able to maintain the correct protocols for handling digital imagery of their teachers, presents many potential issues. We have provided all students considerable training on the use of Class Charts and it is a platform familiar to them and to you. Introducing a new platform, reliant on video, leaves us with many issues to handle. Issues I wish to avoid.

We have significant numbers of families without access to a laptop, digital device or even broadband. We have to cater to all families and not just those with easy access to technology. We have sourced hundreds of laptops and dongles and they have been distributed to families and we are attempting to get more.

Consider, a video streamed lessons uses 250MB of data. That equates to 10GB over a two-week isolation period. Presently, 38% of our learners either do not have access to technology or have limited access to shared devices only. This means that mobile phone usage, to access learning is high. Families without a mobile phone contract with ample data, most likely the poorest families in our community, who are already suffering the most during this pandemic for a multitude of reasons, will have to pay for additional data and we all know this is set at an exorbitant premium. By using Class Charts we can minimise the data usage for all, and keep costs down for all. Furthermore, the DfE allocation of laptops to those families in most need, has been scaled back considerably. We can now only claim 20% of what we require. So, we know mobile usage is increasing for many families and will have to plan accordingly.

Details of our remote learning arrangements can be found on our school website, along with advice and guidance for both students and families. Our remote learning provision ensures that the learning set for all students provides clarity of explanation, scaffolding, modelling and feedback - educational research indicates that it is these elements of effective teaching which best support progress through remote learning, more so than the mode of delivery. What is most frustrating is those that have called for 'live' lessons, have not yet engaged in our current offer. Their children haven't logged on and attempted the work that has been set with our existing system. My teachers have provided audio commentary to PowerPoints and shared supplementary resources to help students connect their learning and make gains in their learning. Putting a child in front of a video, or 'live' lesson, can be a passive learning experience. The method we have adopted takes conscious effort, meaning students are more likely to engage with the physical process of learning and it can become an 'active' experience.

Central to our approach is the need to fully involve parents and carers when supporting students during this period, which is why we have chosen Class Charts as our central platform. This platform notifies parents of learning issued and submitted, as-well as any positive comments. MS Team, does not do this. This ensures that families are fully informed of both our provision and their child's progress with this. Involving families continues to be further supplemented by contact from Form Tutors, Phase Leaders and Heads of Year, with all teaching staff maintaining contact with students through Class Charts. Our analysis shows that on average over 1000 messages are exchanged with students across a week with a significant majority being sent to support and engage with self-isolating students. This figures actually exceeded 2100 messages per week for the self-isolating KS4 students, thus evidencing the commitment of all our staff to support each and every learner required to self-isolate.

Where your child has any concerns about their learning, please encourage them to first contact their teacher on Class Charts so they not only receive a direct response, but can also take ownership of their learning. Please be reassured that all students received input on all our learning platforms across Half-Term 1 and our website features a whole host of guides and tutorials for students to utilise. The website also has a parents' section which provides further guidance on how families can support students who are required to self-isolate.

As I have stated above, I do not expect you to agree with me entirely. I am sharing my thinking and I am stating that ethically and professionally, I feel these are the right decisions to take for our students, given the full extent of the considerations that we have to review at the school. I do not need any reminders from anyone that the best place for your child, or children, is at school, thriving and enjoying being with their friends and working with my staff. Since March I have repeatedly stated I agree with this position.

I am grateful for your kind words of support via the app, email, telephone and when I have spoken to you in passing. I am humbled by your support of me and my staff. We will continue to do our very best for your child, or children, in increasingly challenging times.

I wish you and your families the very best.

Yours faithfully



Matthew West  
Principal