Tuesday March 31st 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

We wanted to write to you to provide some reassurance during what we know is an incredibly challenging time for you all and to let you know a little more about how we are continuing to work to support you and your child.

As a school we are still adjusting to this new way of working. We are all working hard to find ways to best support our families. We know that many of you are working from home yourselves, and having to adapt your own roles to this new way of doing things and that this is bound to make things difficult and sometimes impossible for you to closely supervise your children’s work.

We understand that lots of you have children of different ages and in different schools and that you will be receiving notifications, letters and mails from them all, advising you on how to help your child work at home. While all of this communication (including this letter!) is designed to support, we recognise how overwhelming this sea of information might feel. We also recognise that children of different ages have different needs, and that if you are also the parent of younger children, they will need a good deal of your time.

We are aware that this is a stressful time for all families, and for some there may be other things happening which the current situation has made even harder to manage.

We have been emailing information and guidance on how to cope with homeschooling. If you are lucky, your child will be self motivated and keen to get on with the work set but this will not be true for all! Trying to supervise and motivate secondary school children can be particularly challenging.

Your child will be feeling many emotions:

Many pupils in Year 11 will be disappointed and frustrated that exams have been cancelled when they have been working so hard towards them. Some will feel anxious because they have not worked as hard as they could and had been planning to put the work in now to improve their grades but with exams cancelled feel they have lost this opportunity. We have sent home guidance to Year 11 families and added it to the ‘Latest News’ on the website. We have let you know what we already know about the summer exam situation and have posted information on the website about internal applications to our Sixth Form. The Sixth Form tutor team have been in touch with students with the most up to date information coming from UCAS regarding their University offers for September 2020.

All pupils will be missing their friends (and some their teachers!) and the daily contact with each other in school.

Some will be thinking short term and could be seeing the current situation initially as a holiday and won’t understand why we (and you!) think they should be working.
Many will be anxious about what is happening particularly if they follow the news. They will be anxious about family members they are not seeing, particularly grand parents or those in the vulnerable category, they will be worrying about you if you are still working and having to go out. They may not express this anxiety but could well be feeling it.

All of the above can, as you know, come out as anger, refusal to do what you ask, refusal to do any work, and just generally being difficult.

Whilst some pupils will welcome you showing interest in their work and trying to help organise them, others will not. They may see it as an intrusion, as a lack of trust and in some cases just none of your business. We know how hard this can be to deal with and the friction and tension it can cause at home. It’s not easy to sidestep these battlegrounds, but this is a long-term situation and the most effective approaches will be those that are both sustainable and realistic. We would suggest that it is usually better to encourage a ‘little and often’ approach rather than a whole mass of revision guides, daily timetables and so on. Whilst we will continue to set work and supply resources for your child, there are other educational activities your child could be doing to break up the day and make this enforced period of isolation more enjoyable and useful.

Routine is really important for everyone, managing time has been quite tricky. We would encourage students to try to stick to their normal timetable, and manage time as they would normally do if we were in school. However, this is an opportunity for your child to explore and deepen their interest in the subjects they study. This will help them and prepare them for moving into the next stage of their education. They can be encouraged to research issues wider than but related to the topics they are studying in different subjects, to watch documentaries and so on, all of which will stand them in very good stead later as they will be able to show a real breadth of understanding in their subjects. It might also be a good time to encourage your child to learn new skills.

You can also encourage your child to read and then to talk to you about what they have read. Audio books are also a good way to engage your child, again there are many sites offering free audio books such as https://stories.audible.com/start-listen.

Many museums, art galleries are offering free learning resources, guided virtual tours, videos etc. The National Theatre and The Hampstead Theatre are putting on free online performances. The Google Arts and Culture website https://artsandculture.google.com/ is a fantastic resource that can link the arts across all curriculum areas. Many staff and children are enjoying the morning workouts with The Body Coach Jo Wicks - https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAxW1XT0iEJo0TYIrfn6rYQ

The most important role you have is that of parent – to listen, support and encourage. You shouldn’t feel you have to try and replicate what teachers do at school.

If your child has not really started working or is very reluctant to work, remember these are early days. In these first few weeks, we are all adjusting and coming to terms with the reality of the situation and our new routines. As a school, we are aware of the issues you may be
facing and we will continue to think about what additional help and support we can provide. Please be assured you are not alone.

What we will continue to be doing:

Setting and Marking Work

Our teachers will continue to set work for your children to do at home and will think carefully about how to make it as accessible and engaging as possible. This planning is ongoing and we will continue to keep you updated on what we can do as a school to help support learning at home. Teachers will set tasks on Show My Homework and Google classroom. Where possible staff will include tasks that do not require students to be online continuously, for example, there might be opportunities for students to involve other family members. Staff will mark and give feedback to work submitted. Please ensure that your son/daughter remains in touch with their teachers via google classroom. They must check their school emails regularly and should not be de-rolling themselves.

Pastoral Support

We will continue to provide your child with pastoral support. Tutors have set up a ‘tutor group’ google classroom where you child can safely chat with others in their class as well as their tutor. As staff have been using SMHW and Google Classroom to set work, we will be checking the students who have been using this. Pastoral teams and faculties will, over the next few days, have a sense of who is accessing the work. This will also help identify potentially vulnerable students, some of whom are already being carefully monitored by pastoral teams, SEN, EAL and Greenhouse staff. Tutors and Heads of Year will be communicating with students to check their well-being and ensure they are accessing the work; in the first instance staff are using google classroom, then, if need be, their school email to contact the student via their school email. When a member of staff needs to make contact directly with a parent or carer, please be advised that if they are doing this from home, they will be withholding their personal mobile phone number. Form tutors will be visiting their Google tutor group during 8.40am - 9am Monday to Friday - twice a week. Heads of Year will broadcast two weekly announcements through ShowMyHomework Noticeboard. These messages will also be motivational and will address well-being for students. The broadcasts will include a link to ‘The Day’, students can use this to access the news, it is student friendly and suggest tasks around the articles: https://theday.co.uk/?token=f9655a9fc611d95136339b9df5793151

Class teachers will be monitoring the work their students are completing and accessing and will liaise with pastoral teams and Heads of Faculty to make contact with students and families as appropriate. Heads of Faculty will continue to produce a selection of printed materials for each year group that will be sent home to students that we already know do not have access to ICT and require hard copies of the work.
Wellbeing

We will continue to share wellbeing resources which we think might be helpful, please check your emails, as well as your spam from time to time, and see what we have already uploaded under the ‘Wellbeing’ page, under the ‘About Us’ tab on our website.

Careers Guidance

Alix Boyle, our careers adviser has kindly put together some useful links for families and students who might want to spend time thinking about their child’s next steps, whether that is Options, Sixth Form, University or possible apprenticeships and work. Full details, including virtual HE fairs, Virtual Open Days and online talks and masterclasses can be found on the Careers Section of the website under the ‘Teaching and Learning’ tab.

Free School Meals

Tesco’s vouchers have been emailed to families with children who were entitled to FSM for the last two weeks of term. We are currently receiving guidance from the government about how the national voucher scheme will be rolled out and will be in touch with those families again at the end of the Easter break, thank you for your continuing patience and understanding with this.

The Easter Break

Please be advised that in line with published government guidance, during the Easter period, the school will remain open with a much reduced service for students (from 9am - 1pm) who have been identified as belonging to a specific vulnerable group, or to those who have a parent designated as a key worker as part of the current response to COVID-19. Please be reminded that in all cases, the guidance states that if it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.

We are sure that you would agree that staff have a break over the Easter period. We are not expecting staff to maintain an online presence, although, we are sure that many will choose to do so. Some may provide work by the end of the week that can be accessed over the break - especially Year 11’s. We would ask families to be mindful that responses from staff who choose to maintain communications with their students might not be as prompt during the break.

We’re aware that this is a very difficult time for everyone, and whilst we can attempt to maintain a ‘normal’, this is not always possible and can be very challenging. We’re part of a special community here at the Norwood School, where connection and relationships are key, and each of us will be experiencing many different things in our personal lives with friends and family, as well as looking after our own health at this time. At Norwood, we are first and foremost, a caring community, and our commitment to your children and your family’s wellbeing and happiness is unaltered by these extraordinary circumstances. Thank you to
those of you who have so kindly been emailing your gratitude into us, it has meant a great deal and is much appreciated.

Finally take care of yourselves and your loved ones,
Kindest regards
Ms Nicholas
Senior Deputy Headteacher