

Our ref: PRC/JUE

8 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

You will be aware that we have now entered a third lockdown with all schools closing except for students whose parents are critical workers or are identified as vulnerable (EHCP or Social Worker involvement). This should only be used as a last resort as the government have told us that **“the single most important action we can all take is to stay at home to protect the NHS and save lives”**. This provision will involve independent study on the work set on Frog and not specialist face to face teaching. Should you need to book a slot, please contact joy.davison@ga.newcastle.sch.uk.

I know that the decision to close schools will have created feelings of anxiety, frustration and confusion for our students, parents and staff at a time when we all want assurance and certainty. Students taking vocational exams in January have had a particularly unstable time this week with more Government confusion; those involved know that our stance on this has enabled us to fully support ALL learners, whatever their desires or personal circumstances.

Remote learning

This time around there will be an increased rigour to remote learning as staff and students develop their expertise to a new way of working. Work will be set via Frog, which means that students can access learning through a variety of extra resources provided by departments or narrated PowerPoints.

We also know from the first lockdown period that students really value the chance to connect with staff so, whilst work set on Frog will still be the main source of remote learning, we will also be looking to provide more live lessons, initially for students in Year 11, 12 & 13. For this to happen, Year 11 will need to complete the Acceptable Usage Agreement that has been set as an assignment on Frog. If these sessions continue to prove successful, we will look to introduce a live element with Year 9 and 10 in the future. To ensure we are prepared to do this, we will also be sending out the Acceptable Usage Agreement to Year 9 and Year 10 next week.

A full timetable of live lessons may seem attractive at first glance but often there are numerous logistical issues with this. It can also come at the expense of the things which really make a difference and have given us so much success over the years; the checking of genuine engagement in learning and regular effective personalised feedback. Low impact and minimal student

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engagement live lessons are not uncommon and some of the research also doesn't advocate it. Those parents who have been involved in Teams meetings from a work perspective will know that being 'online', doesn't necessarily mean 'engaged'! Like most things, variety is key.

It is important that students work to a set routine, led by their timetabled lessons (where possible) and in a quiet, appropriate space at home. You or your child can make contact with teachers via email. Teachers have also been asked to make contact with any students who are regularly not completing work.

Students will be required to upload their work, or email it to teachers, on a regular basis so they can receive feedback on their learning. This can be done by uploading a document to Frog or emailing an attachment.

To see more detail regarding our approach to Remote Learning please follow the link:

<https://www.gosforthacademy.org.uk/curriculum/remote-learning-strategy-at-gosforth-academy>

Finally, I'd like to reassure parents that work in this area is fast moving. Please remember schools had no notice and no preparation time of this lockdown. It is not as simple as 'continue to plan lessons as normal and send them home'.

Equally, as a parent myself I completely understand how hard it is to complete your own work and the pressure you feel to support your children too. Please try not to feel too over-whelmed; people sometimes forget this is an unprecedented worldwide emergency situation. You know what is right for your family and whilst we will chase up on those not engaging, this will be done supportively and sympathetically in relation to individual circumstances.

Welfare Calls

We plan to contact every student at least once per fortnight to check in on their well-being. However, please be reminded that students should be encouraged to contact staff when they need to. Some households may receive more than one contact call per fortnight according to their needs. Please be aware that if there is a 'Withheld Number' then it may be from the school so please answer it. We want to ensure that students are coping, not just with their work, but also with the challenges faced with lockdown and isolation.

In Main School, calls will predominately be made by the pastoral or SEN team within that year group.

In Sixth Form, calls will be made by their personal tutor.

Equally, if you feel your child needs some support please let us know.

In Main School the appropriate member of staff can be found via this link:

<https://www.gosforthacademy.org.uk/filecache/fb9/2c8/2147-pastoral-team-setember-latest-2020.pdf>

For any subject specific matter we suggest you contact your class teacher in the first instance.

ICT Access

If you require digital devices please do get in touch with Alison Stanley, Welfare Manager, who may be able to support (Alison.stanley@ga.newcastle.sch.uk). Eligibility criteria might include no suitable device at home other than a mobile phone or a device which is shared between multiple siblings.

Once you have accessed Frog and opened your school email, everything you need is available to you.

Free School Meal Provision

This is now in place and parents can collect their meals from school at 12:25pm.

There was discussion in Parliament of the return of the free school meals vouchers; we have no further information on this at the current time but will share this with you as we receive it.

Year 11 and Year 13 GCSE and A level Examinations

The Secretary of State has confirmed that we will not be asking students to sit GCSE or A-level examinations this summer. Ofqual will consult next week on how to fairly award all pupils with a grade to ensure they can progress to the next stage of their lives.

We will of course let you know when anything further is announced but as you are aware, the situation with this is extremely fluid and new information often arrives on a daily basis. Public exams and vocational assessments scheduled to take place in January can go ahead as planned, however those students affected should have been contacted by class teachers.

The mock examinations for Year 11 and Year 13 will be postponed until students can return to school.

This is undoubtedly a difficult and anxious time for students. It is a shame that they will be denied their usual examination experience as students and staff worked extremely hard last term to prepare them and make up for lost ground. There were further plans regarding revision and catch up strategies planned this term.

It is more important than ever that Year 11 and Year 13 students still put the maximum effort into their studies and aim to produce work of the highest quality. Whichever method the government uses to award grades, it will certainly be based on hard evidence. This means that any assessed work either completed to date or done in future could potentially contribute to final grades.

After school events

Clearly any after school events will be cancelled this half term. This mainly impacts on Year 9 students and the Key Stage 4 Options process. The Year 9 parents evenings scheduled with subject teachers are cancelled. Mr Snowdon, Senior Lead - Curriculum, will be in touch in due course regarding all the work going on behind the scenes to allow the Options process to happen remotely - this includes advice and guidance from departments.

Current Year 11: Progression Appointments & Sixth Form Virtual Open Evening

At this time of year, we are normally starting our first round of progression appointments with our Year 11 students. This is an opportunity for all Year 11 students to meet face to face with a member of the Sixth Form team to discuss plans for the next school year, receive some advice and guidance regarding progression and, if they want to enrol in our Sixth Form, to make a provisional selection of courses. Normally, we also give students their own copy of the prospectus.

Due to the current lockdown, we can't run these appointments in the usual way. We do think it is better to conduct the appointments face to face, so we are going to delay them until after February half term, at which point we hope students will be back in school. If this is not the case, we will conduct the appointments over the phone instead. We will keep you informed as events unfold.

In the meantime, our 2021 prospectus is online for you to browse and our Virtual Open Evening should be live next week. Please take some time to view this and think about choices for next year. The prospectus contains lots of useful information about the Sixth Form, as well as a detailed outline of the courses we offer and their entry requirements.

Finally

This has certainly been an unexpected start to the new term but I am convinced that we all have to look for the positives in each and every situation. We know the current vaccine rollout is the way out of this and let's hope the most vulnerable in our community are vaccinated quickly allowing us all to return to some normality by Spring.

I will write to you fortnightly but please check News Feeds for any updates too.

Please take care and huge thanks to those kind parents who have sent messages of support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Preit Chahal', with a long horizontal line underneath it.

Preit Chahal
Principal