

**St Mary’s Catholic School**

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*where everyone can succeed*

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5th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope you are all keeping safe in these challenging times. We continue to remember in our thoughts and prayers at school, anyone suffering as a result of the COVID-19 virus.

Following last night’s Government announcement of a national lockdown, I wanted to share some key information with Parents and Carers regarding school.

**School closure due to national lockdown**

Due to the national lockdown, all schools are closed through to February half-term, other than for vulnerable students and the children of critical workers. All other students will complete remote learning at home.

**Remote Learning**

All students will continue to access excellent quality remote learning at home, with lesson resources uploaded onto Teams by the end of each lesson. These lesson resources, as outlined previously, include a wide variety of resources to support learning, including regular audio and video explanations. As you know, Teams offers much interaction between teachers and students and also allows teachers to give regular feedback to students on their work. Students are also able to get in touch with their teachers via Teams to ask questions about their work and/or to ask for any further support needed. For Parents and Carers information, we are currently reviewing and updating our remote learning provision, as we always do regularly, to ensure that students continue to be fully supported. Mr McKeating, Assistant Headteacher, will be in touch with parents within the next week with further information.

There is also a vast bank of learning resources and revision materials for all subjects on the school website, to complement the above learning. Again, we are also currently further extending these resources, to ensure students have a wealth of up-to-date resources to support their learning.

I have attached to the end of this letter some guidance to support student well-being whilst working at home. Studying at home while schools are closed, for a prolonged period of time, is far from ideal and, therefore, please do not hesitate to get in touch with your child’s Head of Year, if there is anything at all that we can do to further support your child or your family.

**Vulnerable students and the children of critical workers**

As outlined above, school remains open for a small number of children in defined categories who cannot be safely cared for at home. Vulnerable children are able to attend school and the children of critical workers are also able to attend school. To protect the health and safety of all members of our school community, if your child can be looked after safely at home, please do so. Parents and Carers of these children have now completed a form for us, if they wish their child to attend school this week and/or next week. However, for the remaining weeks of the half-term, if you would like your child to attend school, please complete [**this** **form**](http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/smartfile/d424c8c22ecdf49262ddb820123a649f/uploads/2021/01/05171123/Critical-Workers-Form-Years-7-11.docx). This will help to inform our planning in school. For your information, any students in school during the lockdown will not attend lessons; they will complete the same online work as the students working remotely at home. I know that all other students will be heeding the government instruction to stay at home and to only go out for a bit of exercise.

**Summer examinations**

Examinations for Year 11 and Year 13 will not go ahead and instead the government plan to put alternative arrangements in place. The government have not yet shared any details about what this will involve but as soon as we receive these details, we will be in touch with parents and students. I know this will be a worrying time for students but please reassure your child that they will receive their qualifications, despite not sitting examinations, and whatever system the government decide, we will support them fully to ensure they gain the qualifications they deserve. Therefore, despite the challenging circumstances over the last year, I have no doubt that students will be rewarded for their hard work. We will be in regular touch with you to keep you updated. In the meantime, we would be grateful if students and parents do not contact individual teachers with any queries about grading, how qualifications will be awarded etc. We simply do not have the answers at present, until further government guidance is published, and individual teachers will not be able to discuss this with you. Once we do receive further information, we will share this with you and, if you have any queries, you should get in touch with Dr Stanton, Assistant Headteacher (for Year 11 students) and Mr McKeating, Assistant Headteacher (for Year 13 students).

**January examinations**

The vocational examinations that are taking place in January for Years 12/13 are still going ahead. We have already been in touch with the appropriate parents and students this week, to offer continued support and reassurance. No guidance has yet been issued regarding the small number of vocational exams scheduled for February.

**Free School Meals**

We will continue to provide support for students entitled to Free School Meals. This will continue to be in the form of a voucher scheme, as previously.

We will keep you updated with any further information from the government over the coming days.

Please do take care. I know these are very strange times and the announcement last night will have posed many challenges for families but hopefully, now that there is light at the end of the tunnel with the vaccines, this latest decision will help us all to keep safe and this will be the final ‘push’ to a much brighter future.

Yours faithfully,



Miss Patterson

Headteacher

**GUIDANCE TO PARENTS AND STUDENTS WHILE STUDYING FROM HOME**

**Overview**

Studying at home while schools are closed, for a prolonged period of time, is far from ideal. Therefore, below are some suggestions to help students. Please do not hesitate to get in touch with your child’s Head of Year if there is anything at all that we can do to support your child or your family.

**Taking a break and looking after your well-being**

It is important that students take regular breaks from computers and don’t try to do too much without such breaks. When at school, they have regular breaks, moving from room to room, and also breaks at morning break time and lunchtime. This might be a good rule of thumb – i.e. not to do more than 50-55 minutes without then taking a 5-10 minute break away from where they are working if possible, including getting some fresh air, water etc. They should have a longer mid-morning break and a good lunchtime break.

**Understandable home learning challenges**

There are various other challenges students face. Students don’t have their teacher to call on, nor are they working in a social environment with classmates. Space might be limited in the home. Students may have to share a workspace with other family members. Computers might well have to be shared. Not everyone will have a computer. If your child needs any further support with access to IT, please get in touch with Mr McDonald, Senior Lead Teacher.

Another challenge may be students or family members falling ill. The school recognises all of these challenges and we would urge students just to do their best, not to stress and not to worry about whether they are doing more or less than others. They need to look after themselves, first and foremost, support their families, stay safe and maintain phone/social media contact with friends in the light of social distancing. There is not an expectation that every piece of work set MUST be done, given all the factors above (and others no doubt) that may make this difficult at times.

**Recommended initial way of working**

If circumstances in the home permit, if at all possible, we recommend that students begin by trying to stick largely to their timetables, as teachers will be providing remote learning resources by the end of each lesson on the students’ timetable. This doesn’t mean students have to do the work at precisely the time of day on their timetables, given the many challenges outlined above, but we thought this approach may give some broad structure to their learning.

**Using Teams and navigating the website**

Students are now very familiar with using Microsoft Teams. If they should need any reminders, in the ‘student tab’ on the website, there are further instructions. Teams is where they will find their lesson by lesson resources to complete in each subject. Students are also able to use Teams to contact teachers with any questions about their work. Teachers will also contact students on Teams, sharing feedback on work and offering further support.

On the school website, there is also a wealth of learning resources for KS3, KS4 and KS5 students. If you to the ‘student tab’ and click on ‘Home Study Resources’ you will find these. In the student tab, there are also revision resources for all subjects for our GCSE and A Level students, as well as a list of other useful websites that are excellent to support revision.