



9th April 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

I do hope that you and your families are all still well and managing to keep safe. As the students are now officially on their Easter holiday, I wanted to write to you again in order to provide you all with an update, as promised in my previous letter.

As we continue to operate as a 'virtual school', it has become somewhat difficult to differentiate between term time and holiday, and particularly so as we continue to provide supervision for some of our students in order to help key workers and some others who require our specific support. With this in mind, I would like to thank very much all of the staff who have been involved helping with the 'TST Small School' over these last three weeks. Their hard work and support has ensured that this important provision continues to run extremely smoothly, and I appreciate everything that they have done very much indeed.

Despite missing out on the usual end of term Easter activities (mainly chocolate related ones!), the Homewood community has been very busy providing support and assistance in numerous other ways over recent weeks. This has included donations of food and toiletries to local charities in both Tenterden and Ashford in order to support those who are struggling financially. We have also donated hundreds of protective goggles from our Science Department to the NHS and agreed to lend the NHS the use of our minibuses should they need additional support with transporting their workers during these busy and demanding times. A big thank you to Mr Reidy, the TST Facilities Manager, for his co-ordination with the Local Authority and the NHS to ensure that this could all happen. Mrs Falder, from the Science Department, has also been busy recruiting staff to help with producing drawstring bags made from pillowcases for frontline medics to safely transport their uniforms from work so that they can be put straight into a washing machine to minimise potential contamination. An ingenious idea which is proving to be very popular indeed as Mrs Falder is now getting orders from a senior nurse deployed to work in London's NHS Nightingale Hospital. Well done Mrs Falder!

I am very grateful to many of our associate staff who have been extremely busy undertaking all sorts of important work and providing some vital support over these past few weeks. This includes helping to process vouchers for Free School Meals, planning for September admissions in Year 7 and Year 12, updating attendance records, and ensuring that the school site remains safe and secure. Mrs Williams, Mr Vincer and the IT technical support team have done a particularly commendable job in ensuring that we have everything necessary in order to all be able to work remotely. I am also particularly grateful to Miss King, Mrs Jones, Miss English and the Family Liaison Officers who have been working tirelessly in order to ensure that we are able to maintain a strong level of care to any student in need of pastoral support during this time.

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I would also like to thank all of the teaching staff who have been working exceptionally hard to ensure that the students are able to access their work from home and to continue with their studies. Although nothing can clearly replace the impact of students being in school to receive the direct instruction and immediate feedback from their teachers, the use of the Google Classroom has enabled us to provide the students with the next best thing. Mr Lawson has, in particular, produced some superb guidance, including some very clear and helpful video tutorials, to support students and parents in navigating the Google Classroom and using the platform to its fullest potential. This information is available via the students' Google Classroom accounts but can also be viewed from the school website ([Working at Home](#)). Thank you very much to Mr Lawson for his hard work and care in creating this guidance.

During the weeks ahead, and if not achieved already, it is very important that students form positive working habits which will help them progress. As such, I would very strongly suggest that students should try to follow relatively normal routines during the week. This includes sensible sleep patterns, getting up and dressed ready for work and eating an appropriate breakfast. We would not want to see students working unhealthily late at night. Students should also try to work in an appropriate area and avoid unnecessary distractions so they can focus properly. In Mr Lawson's video (see the above link), he talks about how young people are used to learning within a structured timetable, so helping your children to devise a plan for each day of the week will also help to support their studies. With this in mind, we are recommending that students should aim to complete about 3 hours of work each day.

Please note that teachers will assess work completed in a range of different ways. Some will be relatively superficial, for example asking students to confirm they have accessed the work and understood it. Some will involve asking for extracts of work to be returned, perhaps as an image, and then there will be more familiar methods of assessment, such as formal pieces of assessed work being set and marked. There may also be the use of online quizzes and tests to check overall knowledge and understanding. It will not be possible for teachers to assess every piece of work completed at home. We would therefore encourage parents to take a positive and active interest in their child's work, looking each morning at what has been set and then in the evening checking what has been completed. This will assist us in setting high standards and expectations. Where possible, work completed should be done in exercise books, digitally or on paper. Individual subject teachers should advise your child on this and it may change from one subject to another. If resources such as exercise books have been left at school, then work should be stored by date and subject in an orderly fashion until it can be added to the appropriate book or folder in school.

Whilst we will endeavour to set the right amount of high quality work, this is obviously a new venture for all of us. If you have concerns because too much or too little work is being set, or the guidance is not sufficient, then please ask your son/daughter to email the relevant teacher or contact them via the Google Classroom to politely raise their concerns or to ask for help. If you are still concerned that your child is struggling, please email their Form Tutor or College Co-ordinator (the co-ordinators' email addresses are listed below) who will forward your email on to the relevant teacher. They will then establish how to appropriately manage your concern. I would ask parents to be mindful that whilst we live in a digital age which enables swift communication, please do not expect an immediate response from teachers to any queries. Teachers will continue to have a very significant workload, setting, assessing and chasing work and many will be trying to juggle challenging circumstances at home. Enquiries from students are best submitted via their Google Classroom, rather than through email.

From the start of next term, all of the colleges will be publishing a weekly newsletter to help them keep in touch with the students and to signpost them to additional support and guidance. We will also be using the newsletters to help recognise the work that the students have been completing at home and to celebrate their achievements and successes.

For those parents with sons/daughters in Year 11 and Year 13, we all continue to share the students' upset and disappointment caused by the unprecedented decision to not hold the public examinations this summer. However, as staff, we all continue to be very proud of their achievements and recognise the significant contribution they have made to the school over the years. You will be aware from one of our recent updates on the school website that Ofqual has now published further guidance for students on how grades will be awarded this summer ([Ofqual letter to students](#)). As you have no doubt seen from this guidance, schools are obviously not in control of the processes used to determine the final grades awarded. However, and as we have said previously, we would ask that you help to reassure the students by saying that we will continue as a school to work closely with the awarding bodies and do everything within our power to ensure fairness, parity and that no student is disadvantaged.

I am very grateful to parents for continuing to work with us at this difficult time. By working together we hope we will be able to provide the learning and support your children need in a supportive and encouraging way. We are mindful that this is a difficult time for many students and their families and we are not looking to exacerbate this, but to try to provide some continuity at a very unsettled time.

Having said this, please note that we are not expecting the students to be completing work over the Easter holiday. We would urge all of our students to use the time to rest and recharge their batteries in preparation for the new term. You might want to suggest that your son/daughter looks at some of the online/virtual activities and visits that I shared on the website earlier today via our ['COVID-19 Bulletin Board'](#).

Finally for now, please do contact us if you need any support. We will endeavour to do the best we can to help every member of our Homewood community. In the meantime, I wish you all a happy, healthy and safe Easter break.

Yours sincerely



J K Single
Principal

College Co-ordinators:

Discovery - Ms Castle
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