

7th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

When we opened the Academy back in 2011, we committed ourselves to putting our students first because their achievement and wellbeing were our first priority. We sometimes say that achievement and wellbeing are “two halves of the same walnut”. If we do not support a child’s wellbeing, they are less likely to achieve; if they do not achieve, their wellbeing is likely to be compromised.

Having focused in on achievement in my last email, I therefore want to concentrate this week on wellbeing. The present crisis (and especially the lockdown) has impacted on the wellbeing of our students and their families in at least three ways: it has affected their physical wellbeing, compromised their social wellbeing and threatened their emotional wellbeing.

In terms of students’ **physical wellbeing**, three things are especially important: food, sleep and exercise. One of the big jobs early in the lockdown was organising the distribution of Free School Meals vouchers and, after some initial glitches transferring on to the government scheme, these seem to be working well. However, it is predicted that the UK will see a rise in unemployment to 10% of the working population, which is around 2,000,000 people. With this in mind, it is vitally important that our pupils and their families receive all the support to which they are entitled, and to ensure that no child goes hungry. If you think you may have become entitled to free school meals as a result of a change in your circumstances, please see the box at the end of this email. We are also well aware that sometimes families not normally entitled to Free School Meals find themselves in a position where they need food as a matter of urgency. Thanks to our friends at the Foodbank, we have been able to arrange food parcels for a number of families. If you need emergency help in this way, please do not hesitate to contact matt.nicholson@macclesfieldacademy.org.

One concern that has arisen as a result of the pastoral phone calls that we have been making since the beginning of the closure is that it is clear that for some of our students, establishing a regular sleep routine has been quite difficult. In particular some are staying in bed long into the morning or even the afternoon. While I am well aware of the realities of life with teenagers, I would strongly discourage this routine. In the short term, students will sleep better if they go to bed earlier, phoneless and without any other devices and get up by 9.00 at the latest. In the medium term, this will make the transition back into school much easier for them.

The need for sleep heightens the importance of exercise. We will all sleep better if we have had some exercise during the day whether that is a walk, a run, a bike ride or taking part in one of the PE team’s Instagram challenges @maccacademype. My running days are probably behind me (they never amounted to much) and my bike is languishing in the garage but I have been delighted to discover that the Wales coastal path begins less than 15 minutes’ walk from my house. This will be even more exciting when I am allowed to exercise for more than an hour at a time! Even now,

though, I have no doubt that my daily exercise is good for my sleep and good for my mindset as well as good for my health.

In terms of **social wellbeing**, the lockdown has had the effect of distancing our several hundred naturally highly sociable teenagers from many of their closest friends. In many ways it is very fortunate that this has happened in the era of Facetime, Houseparty and Zoom so that they can at least stay in some form of visual contact. I know that some pairs and larger groups of students have been linking up to schoolwork tasks together. This is something that I think is very positive and that I would want to encourage. We currently have a group of staff investigating the possibility of live video lessons for some groups. I will keep you posted as to how this develops. Positive as all this online activity is, it is not without its risks. Please monitor students' online activities carefully. There is advice on e-safety issues on our website at <https://www.macclesfieldacademy.org/home-working/e-safety/>

In terms of **emotional wellbeing**, our tutors and pastoral team will continue to call at least once a fortnight and I know from the feedback we have received that many of you have very much valued the support they have given. Sometimes, however, it helps to have more independent or specialist support and I have been contacted by both Visyon and Just Drop In who, in normal circumstances work with many of our students to say that they are continuing to offer online and telephone support. Vision is a charity that supports the emotional health of children and young people and their families. They are still open and offering telephone services, along with a range of online activities. You can call them on 01260 290000 or visit their website at www.visyon.org.uk. Just Drop-In is still here and ready to support young people through difficult times. If you are aged 12-17 and live in Wilmslow, Knutsford, Poynton or Macclesfield you can access their free telephone counselling service. Get in touch and they can make arrangements for you to talk to a counsellor on a weekly basis. Ring 01625 665079 (Monday to Friday 10-6) or email Hello@justdropin.co.uk.

Remember, too, that Tony Togneri, minister of St George St Church, is continuing to work closely with the Academy and can be contacted on 07595 728739.

I think we would all agree that the very best thing that could happen for the wellbeing of our children would be for them to be able to return safely to school. We are not at that point yet, but behind the scenes we are working hard to make plans for a partial reopening whenever that becomes possible. When that does happen (and we may get some idea of a possible time scale in the announcements the Prime Minister makes over the weekend). It will be school, but not as we know it. It is likely that there will be a different timetable and different group sizes as well as a whole range of special arrangements to minimise the risk of infection. As we get clearer government advice on the issues involved, including the timescale, I will keep you up to date in future emails.

One piece of very good news which confirms what we had already believed to be the case is the announcement of Ofqual's decision that ***students of any age and in any year group who had been entered to take exams this summer will be able to receive a calculated grade on the same basis as***

other students this summer. This is the outcome of pressure from parents and schools all over the country but it is gratifying that their decision is expressed in almost exactly the same words as our parliamentary petition. I should like to give one final thankyou to everybody who took part in this campaign which has made a real difference to many of our students.

Finally some weeks ago, I was sent a wonderful article written by the Headteacher of an international school in Italy I have been waiting for the right time to use some of it. As I think of all the issues around re-opening the Academy, this feels like a good time to quote the final couple of paragraphs to remind myself of what being open again will mean from day to day.

I have started a list of things I am looking forward to doing when we come out of lockdown: marking work with a pen, having a child greet me with a smile as I pass them in the corridor, leafing through exercise books to watch a year of progress unfold, wandering around the playground and hearing the happy laughter of students, a child proudly coming in to my office on their birthday, students telling me about sporting successes.

Though it has been hard, we have got to a point where we can keep going. Hopefully, it won't be long before we can see our colleagues, the parents and most of all, the reason we do this job our students. As we say in Italy: Andra tutto bene ...everything will be fine.

Take care and stay safe. Andra tutto bene.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Hedge', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

RICHARD HEDGE

Headteacher

The Macclesfield Academy

Park Lane

MACCLESFIELD

SK11 8JR

Email. richard.hedge@macclesfieldacademy.org

PA: Lara Nolan

Tel. 01625 383113

Email: lara.nolan@macclesfieldacademy.org

You can claim free school meals for each child who attends school if you receive one of these benefits:

- Universal Credit with no earned income or with net monthly earnings less than £616.67
- Income Support
- Income based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income related Employment Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit - as long as you have a yearly household income of less than £16,190 (as assessed by HM Revenue and Customs) and do not get Working Tax Credit
- Working Tax Credit run-on (paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

To claim Free School Meals, please click the link below, sign in and fill in the online form on the Cheshire East website.

<https://synergyweb.cheshireeast.gov.uk/Website/Enquiries/Citizen/FreeSchoolMeals.aspx> or alternatively contact Cheshire East on 0300 123 5012 for further information and help.

In school, Mr Nicholson or any of the pastoral team are happy to talk this through with you in complete confidence.