

January 15th 2021

This update contains information about:

- Laptop loan scheme
- X boxes as remote learning devices
- Boosting your data
- Remote learning support fund
- On line form time and safeguarding
- Definition of critical workers
- Face masks
- DfE/Ofqual exams consultation
- Lateral Flow testing
- Free School Meals vouchers
- Year 9 Parents' Evening
- Pathways Evening

Dear Parents and Carers

When I wrote last week, I ended by saying that there would be “further information to follow” on each of the points that I had covered in that email. Another week has passed and that is certainly the case. In this email I want to update you on much of the information I provided last week after another few days when things seem to have moved very quickly. Firstly, though, I am pleased to report that we know of no further cases of coronavirus infections amongst our students or staff. Throughout the crisis we have been fortunate in the relatively low rate of infections within our Academy community and I very much hope that all of you continue to stay safe and well

For the overwhelming majority of our students, **remote teaching** is progressing well. They have responded well to the timetabled lessons and the proportion accessing these has risen steadily over the last two weeks. For some however, there are challenges which we are still working to overcome either by supplementing their online diet with paper based resources and/or visits to school or by helping out by supporting access to devices or internet connectivity. In particular there are three schemes for supporting families which I want to outline here:

- We have currently loaned out our full application of laptops under the **DfE loan scheme**. We have a small but growing waiting list which we hope to use as evidence to support an application for additional machines. The DfE track when the machines they have issued become active. If, for any reason, you have one of these loan machines that you are no longer using, please return it. We will not be successful in further applications if machines already provided are not being used.
- Some students are already successfully accessing lessons using **their X Box or PlayStation**. Details on how to do this can be found on our website at: [Technical Support - The Macclesfield Academy](#).
- For some students the barrier to remote learning is not about devices but about **data**. For families with no fixed broadband connection, many of the mobile phone providers are now offering free data boosts to support students with home learning. If you think you may be eligible for this, please contact paul.reed@macclesfieldacademy.org who will be glad to guide you through the application process.

At the suggestion of one of our parents, we have set up a **remote learning support fund**. This will enable us to purchase items such as laptops and data dongles for students who are still struggling to access their remote lessons on a regular basis. I am very grateful for this suggestion. Any parents who would like to contribute to this fund can do so via the school gateway.

Safeguarding our students remains an absolute priority. Now that we have online form times in place, some tutors will arrange 1:1 online conversations with students at the end of these sessions. This may mean you do not receive the same frequency of calls as a parent. However, if there is anything you wish to raise, please do not hesitate to email your son or daughter's tutor using the email addresses at [Staff Emails - The Macclesfield Academy](#). The feedback from parents has been that these form times have been very useful in establishing a routine at the start of the day. Please do what every is necessary to ensure students are up and ready to take part in these activities!

In school provision has been accessed this week by approximately 55 students (not all on the same day). This is proportionately greater than almost every other Cheshire East secondary school. These students have been working in two bubbles: one of students in Year 7-8 and one of those in YY 9-11. As part of the ongoing process of assessing risk and implementing control measures,

we are taking steps to reduce the maximum number in a classroom at any one time. To this end we have created a third bubble of students who will have the support of SEND colleagues as they continue to access online lessons as well as taking part in other activities. It is fair to say that making simultaneous provision for students on site and students online is stretching our staffing resources to the limit. We are fully committed to making provision for any of our students who meet the criteria for vulnerability or coming from a critical worker family and cannot safely or easily work at home and we will continue to do this for as long as necessary. However, if your child has been attending provision in school but could equally well access the online work at home, please make whatever arrangements you can for them to stay at home.

I am currently working with our health and safety committee to rewrite our risk assessment to reflect the realities of Lockdown 3.0 including the much higher infection rate. One of the issues that we have been discussing is the wearing of **masks**. Staff have expressed concern both at the number of students not wearing masks when they are out and about in the corridors (or not wearing them properly) and about the number who have exemptions from wearing masks. If your son or daughter is coming into school at the moment, please ensure that they have a clear understanding of how the mask should be worn. I am sure you will understand that we have to take our safety measure very seriously and we will not hesitate to apply sanctions up to and including exclusion if students are not wearing masks correctly. If your child currently has an exemption from wearing a mask, I would also ask you to consider whether this is strictly necessary and, if possible, whether we can work together to support them in wearing one or a visor or faceguard as an alternative. Where the exemption is absolutely necessary, we will, of course, continue to allow students not to wear masks.

Earlier this week, the government published an exchange of letters between Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State, and Simon Lebus, Head of Ofqual about the **arrangements for the 2021 exams**. The letters can be found at [Letter from Gavin Williamson to Simon Lebus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/letter-from-gavin-williamson-to-simon-lebus) Essentially, these letters are an agreement that the DfE and Ofqual will undertake a joint consultation on the best way to award exam grades given that it will no longer

be possible for exams to take place as normal. I have picked out some of the key phrases in the Secretary of State's letter below:

- *I am asking Ofqual to consult on alternative arrangements for GCSE, AS and A levels which should involve the awarding of **grades based on teacher assessment**.*
- *Given the disruption children and young people have faced, it is vital we maximise the remaining opportunity for them **to be taught for as long as possible**, so they have every opportunity to catch up.*
- *It is my view that a teacher's final judgement on a student's grade ought to be **as late as possible in the academic year to maximise remaining teaching time** and ensure students are motivated to remain engaged in education.*
- *This year we are asking teachers to assess their students, and it is my view that we should seek ways to support them to do so in a fair and consistent fashion. **A breadth of evidence should inform teachers' judgements**.*
- *In addition, I would like to explore the possibility of providing **externally set tasks or papers**, in order that teachers can draw on this resource to support their assessments of students.*

In short, students will receive grades based on teacher assessment and these grades will reflect the quality of the work they do late into the summer term, including, possibly, "externally set tasks or papers". This has inevitably set all sorts of rumours running both in the press and online. Experience has taught us that the best course is to ignore all of this and await the formal consultation process. Once the consultation has been launched (and we do not yet know the timescale for this) I will write in more detail and advise on whether there are any key issues at stake for our students. Key issues to look for will be:

- The nature of the "externally set tasks or papers"
- The identification of what can (and cannot) be included in the "breadth of evidence" that should inform teachers' judgements

- The treatment of students expecting to take exams in Year 10 (we fought and won an important battle on this point last year)
- Any differences in the treatment of GCSEs and Technical Awards
- The arrangements for special consideration for any students who have been disproportionately affected by the virus and/or the lockdowns
- The arrangements made for students with SEND
- The quality assurance arrangements including any necessary training and support for schools and staff and their implications for staff workload

In the meantime, the advice to students who would have taken exams this summer is clear: you should continue engaging with your exam courses and with completing the work you are set by your teachers. Indeed this work is more important than ever before because it could provide the evidence we will need to justify our assessment of your grade. There is one further thing I need to say to parents. Naturally I shall be happy to discuss with you the process by which grades are awarded as soon as this becomes clear. Please do not, however, try enter into any discussions with teachers as to the grade your son or daughter is likely to achieve. If there are any particular actions that subject teachers think students need to take to reach their potential grades, they will, of course, contact you directly.

In the middle of these developments, we have continued to grapple with the ***introduction of Lateral Flow Tests***. Many of our staff have now successfully completed their training and they will be joined as testing assistants and processors by three volunteers from the local community. If any parents are interested in volunteering to support in this way, I would be delighted to hear from you. Parents of the students currently in school have been sent consent forms and testing for these students is scheduled for Tuesday next week. We were grateful for a visit from Nicola Axford from Cheshire East Council earlier today. Nicola is leading on the testing programme in schools across the Borough and made a number of helpful suggestions about the layout of our testing room and the administration of the tests. It is important to emphasise that participation in these tests is voluntary. However, there is a clear safety benefit to all of us in school in being able to identify any asymptomatic carriers of the virus as soon as possible so I hope parents will support this process unless they have exceptional reasons for not doing so.

As parents of children entitled to **Free School Meals** will be aware, for the last two weeks we have provided **vouchers** to cover the cost of the meal children would normally have received in school. From the start of next week a national scheme comes into place and we will move over to this scheme as soon as we have all the details. The scheme provides vouchers for use in your choice of one of a number of supermarkets. Please remember that any shop which is paid for (or part paid for) with a voucher **cannot** include alcohol or tobacco.

As parents of students in year 9 will already be aware, our **online parents evening** will continue as planned on 20th January. If you have not already received the times for your appointments, these will follow very shortly. Please remember that the sessions are automatically ended by the software at the scheduled finish time so it is important to join the meeting promptly at the start. Our **pathways evening** scheduled for 27th January has, however, been postponed as we consider the implications of this latest lockdown for next year's curriculum. It will now take place, virtually, on a date to be confirmed shortly after half term.

This feels like a lot to take in in one email- I hope that next week things will be starting to settle down a bit and I will not need to write at such length. Right through, the pandemic, however, my commitment has been to keep you fully informed and I shall continue to do so. For now though, please do everything you can to stay safe.

With every best wish

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Hedge', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

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