

January 6th 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

Once again the world around us has changed at breath taking speed and I am writing with a progress report from the front line. I cannot claim (yet) that I can answer every single question about every aspect of how we will operate over the next few weeks but I do want to keep everybody in the picture as far as I possibly can.

Firstly I am pleased to report that we know of no further cases of coronavirus infections amongst our students over the Christmas break. One colleague did contract the virus after the end of term but is, I am pleased to say, well on the road to recovery. Nonetheless, in Macclesfield specifically, in Cheshire as a whole and nationally, the infection rate has risen rapidly and the national lockdown, including partial school closures underlines the seriousness of the current situation. It goes without saying that I hope every one of you stays safe and well over the next few, difficult, weeks.

The lockdown decision affects all aspects of the Academy's work. I want to summarise some of the most important implications.

Remote teaching is now well underway. In the great majority of cases this is via Microsoft Teams lessons. We have provided almost 100 students with loan laptops. This has just about exhausted our current supply on loan machines. We are watching with interest for details of further supplies of loan machines from the DfE. If your child is still struggling to access online learning for want of the most appropriate hardware, please contact paul.reed@macclesfieldacademy.org and we will put you on the waiting list. In the meantime, please note that problems in accessing remote learning are one of the criteria for vulnerability which would allow a student to attend school to access lessons on our network. If you would like your child to attend for this reason, please email lara.nolan@macclesfieldacademy.org. In addition to hardware, I know that some families are experiencing difficulties with the data requirements and costs of online learning. Over the course of this week we have become aware of some packages to support parents in this situation and we are currently investigating these. I will publish further details as soon as we have them. Unlike the first lockdown, lessons will be set to mirror the normal school timetable (with the exception of enrichment on Thursday afternoons). Details of each lesson (including any necessary resources) can be found on show my Homework. You can find a series of guides (including video guides) to help you find your way around teams, Show My Homework and other aspects of the remote learning process on our website at <https://www.macclesfieldacademy.org/home-working/technical-support/>.

One innovation this week has been the introduction of **online form times**. These take place every day at 0840. The give every single student a daily point of contact with their tutor as well as 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 60 students. These students are working in two bubbles: one of students in Year 7-8 and one of those in YY 9-11. They are following exactly the same online lessons as those at home including the Teams lessons. For the rest of this week, the start time will continue to be 0850. However, having introduced the online form times at the start of the day, we will need to bring forward this start time for students attending school.

These students should, therefore, arrive by 0835 from Monday 11th January. If you are a critical worker or you believe your child is vulnerable but have not yet requested a place, please contact Lara Nolan on the address above. We will not turn anyone away who meets either of these criteria.

Safeguarding our students remains an absolute priority. For those in school, we have begun each day with a safety briefing. Those at home will receive phone calls over the next couple of weeks, to check they are safe and well and to identify any difficulties they may be having in accessing the remote learning. Much as we are always glad to talk with parents as well, the prime purpose of these calls is to talk with students themselves.

It is now confirmed that ***GCSE exams are cancelled*** although technical and vocational qualifications (ie those in Graphics, Hospitality & Catering, iMedia, and Sport) will proceed as planned. By the time you get this email it may well be that the Secretary of State has given more details of how grades will be awarded. I will write in more detail on this early next week. It is clear that schools will need an evidence base for any centre assessments and it is, therefore important that all students on all exam courses continue to work as normal.

The ***introduction of Lateral Flow Tests*** will proceed but slower than planned. This week the focus has been on training and preparation. You will shortly be sent detailed information asked to give your consent via the gateway. We expect to begin testing for staff and those students currently attending school by the end of next week. The tests are self administered with the guidance and support of trained assistants. Once the current restrictions are lifted, mass testing gives us the opportunity to return to something much closer to normal without the need for staff our students to be absent owing to self-isolation. I would strongly encourage parents to consent to this testing process.

As I say, there will be further information to follow on each of these points. For now, though, I want to put on record my gratitude and admiration for everything that my colleagues have achieved over the last three days. I had hoped and expected that we would have a full remote learning provision in place by the end of the week but, not for the first time, my staff have exceeded my expectations. I have no doubt that there will be further adjustments that we will want to make over the next few weeks but we have been on a massive learning journey over the last 10 months and I am very proud of the point we have now reached.

Please take care and stay safe.

With every best wish

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

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