

January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers and Students,

Update on January opening and Remote Learning Policy amendments

Whilst I only wrote out formally just a short while ago, I thought a Trust-wide update at this point was appropriate.

Alongside our Trustees and very many incoming messages from families I wanted to publicly commend our school leaders for the timely and positive response they have made over the last few days in what has once again been a set of unprecedented circumstances.

On-site provision

In our schools across the Trust we now have our ‘bubbles’ in place to accommodate vulnerable and critical worker pupils. The demand for places, with the changes made at last minute to the criteria, has been significant. In many of our primary schools for example, this has resulted in every classroom being in operation and day-to-day deployment on-site of every employee. In turn, this will have some impact on the type of Remote Learning some schools will be able to offer, but we trust not the quality. We have also needed to respond, without advance notice in our contingency planning, to open all of our nursery settings to all families who would like their usual timetabled sessions. You will understand, I am sure that this also causes an additional demand on in-school resource.

I am delighted to state that this is now all in place and working alongside parents and students we trust that our established system of Covid-19 control measures will allow us to keep all of our ‘bubbles’ secure and open, wherever possible. For those attending on-site, please do continue to inform your school in the usual way of any absence, illness as you would ordinarily and of course as a matter of utmost vigilance should there be any signs of Covid-19 symptoms.

Remote learning – on and off site

The significant change this Spring Term is that Remote Learning each day is now for ALL pupils, with increased expectations from the DfE for the time spent learning each day – though to note that this is not necessarily device based learning of course. Those in school will follow the same learning programme each day as those at home. Even with the best of preparation, this will still take some time to get established and every school has plans for elements to trial and evolve over the coming weeks such as to keep learning fun and fresh. One consideration is that for those schools where there are not Chromebook lease schemes in place for students or we cannot guarantee one-to-one access, we have to plan Remote Learning to include *considerable time away from devices*. There are many well documented reasons for this including health and wellbeing, shared access in the home, bandwidth and so forth. One nuance to note though is that unfortunately our Trust is not a great beneficiary from the DfE technology scheme to date (albeit we will keep petitioning and applying) and therefore many of our schools have loaned out considerable numbers of school devices over the past few days, which means that those learning in school bubbles at times have some limits to their access in school. We have just pulled forward some £40,000 of additional devices to try and bridge this gap, alongside working with some generous local charities and businesses.

In October we issued our initial Remote Learning Policy. Since then, I know many families will have become familiar with our Tapestry and Google Classroom platforms as well as having completed Acceptable Usage Agreements such as to be able to engage in video and audio links, streamed content. All of our schools have endeavoured to ‘stay fresh’ with these platforms through home-learning, class activities etc as part of our contingency work.

Contd.

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On 7th January the DfE issued revised Remote Learning guidance and as a result we have very recently revised our [Trust Policy, which can be found HERE](#). Each of our Trust schools will update the detail of their Remote Learning provision referenced against this Policy, share it with you and place it on their website in due course. Every school is on an individual journey with Remote Learning according to the technology available, the training of their staff, the needs of their pupils, but even with a National Lockdown, we will still endeavour to learn and share across the Trust and evolve our offer to be creative and engaging for our pupils. Ultimately, as clearly referenced in research, the DfE guidance and our Policy, we want impact in continuity of learning and motivation and wellbeing in our young people.

Please do discuss feedback with your child's school; with the class teacher and with your school's Headteacher. Please give the changes to Policy a chance to embed. Please encourage the staff too, as so many of you do; there are countless committed professionals working tirelessly to try and get it right for those on-site and off, at the same time in many cases! Towards the end of last week, the honest truth is that many staff were already in need of some boost and the positive messages flowing in to our schools have been such a tonic – THANK YOU.

One final word on Remote Learning – we understand that every family circumstance is different and whilst educational continuity is vital, health, happiness and well-being is absolutely paramount too. We know that, especially in households with several young children, the revised expectations from the DfE are a challenge. We need to work in honest and open partnership throughout this period with our young people at heart - please do let your child's teacher know in the first instance if you are struggling.

Thank you for your time in reading this and the [Revised Remote Learning Policy](#). I wish you and your family the very best in these most challenging of times.

Yours sincerely,

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