

17 April 2020



Dear parents and carers

I hope you had a Happy Easter.

In these strange times when days and routines blend into each other, I heard someone say amusingly that we are turning into labradors; focusing on our next meal and our next walk!

We should now be, by rights, at the end of the Easter holiday, preparing for the start of term next week. However, the school has been open right through the holiday; we have a number of students in today working on a range of activities. I'd like to thank the staff that have been coming in over their holiday to support our students and to keep the school running.

### **Awarding examination grades this year**

Last week, Ofqual published its guidance on the grading of GCSEs, AS and A Levels this summer. They have since confirmed that this will also apply to the EPQ. BTEC and Cambridge National qualifications will be subject to a similar process. Ofqual is still finalising its guidance on this.

In short, schools have been asked to use their professional experience to make a fair and objective judgement of the grade they believe a student would have achieved had they sat their exams this year. I have sought advice from professional teaching associations on how to manage this process ethically and fairly and provided teachers with detailed guidance.

Some students and parents have contacted me to say that their children have their school books and folders at home. They are concerned that teachers will not have all the evidence they need to make a fair grade judgement. Should they bring their children's work back into school?

I totally understand this concern and should like to provide the following reassurance. There is no need to return exercise books or folders. Teachers know their students well. They will take into account a wide range of evidence, including non-exam assessment; the results of any homework assignments or mock exams; and any other records of student performance over the course of study. Teachers are well placed to make fair, considered judgements because moderation has been an integral component of examination courses for some time.

### **Sixth form**

We know that students in Year 13, their families and friends have many understandable questions and concerns about their university applications. Follow [this link](#) to the UCAS website for further up-to-date advice and explanations.

### **National Voucher Scheme for Free School Meals**

We are aware of the frustrations some parents and carers have experienced with the national voucher scheme. I am sincerely sorry that some families have experienced further hardship as a result of this during already difficult times.

The Trust began to supply supermarket vouchers to parents of children eligible for free school meals at the start of the pandemic. The Government system came into effect on Monday 6 April and was upgraded over the Bank Holiday weekend. It is clearly under pressure from the high demand and not all eCodes have been fulfilled. In future, the system will allow schools to place one order for a family to cover a period of up to four weeks (£60 instead of £15 over fours).

We have submitted orders up to and including the week commencing 11 May 2020. eCodes have been grouped together where parents and carers have more than one child eligible for free school meals. Unfortunately, due to data protection and financial procedures, we cannot provide this information on behalf of other schools if, for example, parents and carers have children at another school.

### **Staffing**

Mrs Gilbert steps back from her role as Progress Leader for Year 9 at the start of the summer term, but will remain with us to teach mathematics and music. I should like to thank Mrs Gilbert for the strong lead she has given to the Year 9 team, and the tireless support and guidance she has given to the students in her year group.

### **Showing our appreciation**

I'm sure we will all enjoy accompanying the [National Youth Orchestra](#) at 5pm this evening as they sing and play Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. Last night's ovation for NHS staff and other key workers was the loudest and most impressive yet, and served once again to remind us of the crucial role they play in our society. How fortunate we are.

### **And finally...**

"Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

'Pooh!' he whispered.

'Yes, Piglet?'

'Nothing,' said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw. 'I just wanted to be sure of you.' "

From [The House at Pooh Corner](#) by A A Milne

Stay safe and well



*Peter Whear*  
Headteacher