



WILLIAM FARR

C of E Comprehensive School

Our ref: JMK/SXG

10 February 2021

Dear Parent/Guardian

School Update

On Wednesday 27 January 2021, the Government announced that schools will not reopen immediately after the February half term holiday, but that they hoped that it would be safe to commence the reopening of schools from Monday 8 March 2021. Their reason for suggesting this date is that they are hoping to achieve the target of vaccinating everyone in the four most vulnerable groups with their first dose by Monday 15 February 2021 so that they have developed immunity from the virus by three weeks later (Monday 8 March 2021). **The school will therefore remain closed to all students**, except those whose parents are critical workers and vulnerable children, **for at least the first two weeks after half term**. The Government has said that an announcement of their plans to reopen schools will be made at the end of February as they have promised to give schools a two-week notice period to make plans. As soon as this information is received, I will let you know.

It is important that we all continue to support the national focus to stay at home wherever possible. By keeping your child at home, you are helping to minimise the risk to your child, your family and the wider school community. As of Friday 5 February 2021, 123 people (79 staff and 44 students), who have been regularly attending school, have received a Lateral Flow Test as part of the Government's mass testing programme. Since January 2021, we have had 4 confirmed cases of Covid-19 in school and appropriate steps were taken to isolate close contacts.

Following the school closure, we have reorganised our dates for Year 11 students to prepare for the Sixth Form in September 2021. Year 11 students will be able to take part in a virtual Sixth Form Options Morning on Thursday 25 February 2021. This will be followed by a remote Year 11 Parents' Evening on Tuesday 2 March 2021. The deadline for Sixth Form applications to be submitted has now be extended to Friday 12 March 2021. Year 11 reports are currently available on Progresso.

The third engagement report showing your child's engagement with remote learning will be released to parents later this week. This has proved to be a valuable communication with parents and enabled us to celebrate students' efforts and bring to parents' attention any issues. Please continue to check the work that your child is completing on the VLE during remote learning and contact us on: wfarr@williamfarr.lincs.sch.uk if there are any issues.

The school is continually reviewing its IT provision to provide you with improved access to your child's learning. We are now pleased to provide parents with access to the school's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) where you will be able to see your child's timetable, tasks set and general information. This is also now available through a downloadable app. Further information about how you can access the VLE and the app can be found on the school website (www.williamfarr.lincs.sch.uk) under the *Covid Correspondence* section.



We recognise that there have been some students who have had problems accessing IT devices from home to support their remote education. The school has received and distributed 90 laptops to children who either have had no digital devices in their household or whose only available device is a smartphone, or who only have access to a single device that is being shared with more than one other family member. In addition, 4 wireless routers have been loaned to families. This is part of the national Government laptop scheme to help disadvantaged children learn from home.

If your child is unable to access WiFi from home, please check if you are near to a BT hotspot <https://www.btwifi.com/find/> and then contact the school. We have been given a small number of vouchers for free WiFi through BT hotspots. In addition, the Department for Education has launched a scheme to temporarily increase data allowances for mobile phone users on certain networks. This is available for children to access remote education if either their face-to-face education is disrupted, they do not have access to broadband at home or they have parents who, due to financial constraints, are unable to pay for additional data for their devices. If you would like to discuss any of these two initiatives or have any problems accessing IT from home, please contact the school on: wfarr@williamfarr.lincs.sch.uk and we will be pleased to help.

Over the last 12 months, there may be some children who are spending time at home accessing content using IT devices which is not always appropriate. While there is no perfect way to eliminate this risk, there are steps parents can take to support their child online to reduce the risk. Below are some practical steps which may be helpful:

- *Contact your Internet Service Provider (ISP). Companies that provide broadband such as BT, Sky and Virgin, offer free protection for parents. You can filter internet connection directly, without having to install anything. Guidance on how to use this can be found at: <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/broadband-mobile/>*
- *YouTube is a great teaching resource, especially for homeschooling, but not all the content is appropriate for children and not all YouTube channels are made for young audiences. The main YouTube app has a restricted mode which parents can use. More information can be found at: <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/entertainment-search-engines/youtube-app/>*
- *Games consoles have features that can limit what games children can play based on the age ratings and can turn off certain features to allow gaming to be a safer. To learn more about these features visit <https://www.internetmatters.org/parental-controls/gaming-consoles/>*
- *Games are also rated based on the content, not how difficult they are. 18-rated games can have very graphic violence, adult language and themes, sexual content and horror elements. More information about appropriate games and ratings can be found at <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/gaming-whats-appropriate-for-your-child/> or by visiting <https://parentzone.org.uk/article/pegi-games-ratings-explained>*

It's important to remember that no filters or controls are 100% effective so it is essential that your child knows that they can, and should, talk to someone if they see or hear anything upsetting online so that reassurance can be offered.

This information from Thinkuknow is very useful: <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/articles/Im-worried-my-primary-aged-child-might-see-something-inappropriate-online/>

Thank you to those parents who completed the online parent survey between Tuesday 26 January and Tuesday 2 February 2021 to help us to evaluate our remote education provision. Parents completed the survey for 175 children. Whilst this represents a small proportion of the student population, the survey results were very pleasing and show that the school is offering a remote education provision that is being valued by parents and students.



It was reassuring to see that almost all parents reported that their child has good access to IT devices at home and that students like the variety of teaching methods being used, including live lessons, VLE resources and pre-recorded lessons. Most parents stated that their child is managing with the pace and content of lessons and receives appropriate feedback on key pieces of assessed work. Almost all parents confirmed that their child knows how to get help with their work and knows how to remain safe when working online. It was pleasing to know that almost all parents have found the engagement report useful in informing them about their child's learning and that, overall, children are managing as best they can with the demands of online learning.

Just over a third of parents who completed the survey added comments and the school is appreciative of this feedback. All comments have been read and whilst it is not possible to respond to individual parents who completed the survey anonymously, any generic issues raised will be considered by the school going forward. The parents who gave the name of their child in the survey have been contacted by the school. In response to the survey, please see attached a Frequently Asked Questions sheet at the end of this letter, which clarifies some of the generic points raised. A student survey will follow shortly.

I am very aware of the considerable family pressures placed upon you at this time to manage work, home life and home learning. We have now uploaded some additional free resources onto the VLE, under the Care and Guidance/Student Welfare section. This signposts support for students on maintaining positive mental wellbeing; including child-friendly information on Covid-19, help in managing stress/anxiety and Children's Mental Health Week 2021. <https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/parents-and-carers/>

If you or your family are suffering from financial hardship at this time and would like any additional support to access food and care parcels, please contact Mrs Bates (Assistant Headteacher) in confidence, via email: h.bates@williamfarr.lincs.sch.uk. To date, the school has distributed 5 food and care parcels to families and 2 parcels of sanitary products.

I do share your frustrations in your child having to continue with remote learning at home for a while longer and would like to thank you for the time and effort you have spent supporting your child's education and welfare. Please encourage your child to have some non-screen time over the break and enjoy some leisure activities. This is important for their mental health and wellbeing.

If you have any questions or need further support, please do not hesitate to get in touch with the school on: wfarr@williamfarr.lincs.sch.uk.

I will write to you after the half term holiday when hopefully we know more about the Government's reopening plans. We look forward to all students returning to school very soon as the national vaccination programme takes effect.

I wish you and your family a safe and restful half term holiday.

Yours faithfully

Jonathan Knowler
Headteacher



William Farr School – Remote Education

Frequently Asked Questions

(based on generic comments made by parents in the February 2021 survey)

Why are all lessons not on Teams?

The school's remote education offers blended learning in line with Department for Education and Ofsted recommendations. This includes a mixture of live lessons, recorded lessons, online tasks, as well as pen and paper activities. This gives variety and helps families with shared devices to access more of our offer. It also limits screen time for students and staff.

Why are all Teams lessons not 1 hour?

In an attempt to reduce potential screen time in Key Stage 3 and 4, we have asked staff to limit the amount of direct teaching to between 20 and 30 minutes per lesson. Students should be given an activity to work on for the rest of the lesson. The teacher may remain on the Teams call allowing students to re-join if they have any questions. A level students typically have 3 – 4 lessons per day, giving them free time to work away from their computer each day so their online lessons will tend to last the hour.

Why has the timetable not been modified?

The school is following its full timetable to give students routine and structure, as well as to help them to continue to progress in the curriculum. This follows the Department for Education recommendation. We are encouraging work to be able to be completed, as far as possible, within each lesson. Year 11 and Year 13 should expect some additional work, but we will only set work to them that is deemed essential to their studies. Homework has been paused for other year groups to enable students to work in the school day and pursue interests and enrichment activities after 3.30pm each day. Feedback, to date, suggests that most students are managing this workload. We are keeping this under review.

Why is there not a scheduled timetable of Teams lessons?

Teams lessons are subject to staff availability. Staff are on a rota to come into school and many are faced with the demands of home-schooling their own children so it may be difficult to schedule them on the same periods each week. In addition, the online lessons have to be scheduled to best fit with the delivery of the topic. We are finding that most staff are developing a routine of lessons.

Why aren't all Teams meetings scheduled well in advance?

The teaching staff are working very hard to balance a range of demands on their time and, whilst most aim to issue their Teams invites in plenty of time before each lesson, sometimes this isn't possible. Students should expect to follow their normal timetable and where they haven't seen work set for a particular lesson in advance, they should check the VLE and their Teams calendar at the start of that lesson.

Why do students have to mute and turn their camera off during Teams lessons?

This was originally intended as a safeguarding measure. Staff can invite students to unmute or turn their camera on to participate in the lesson. Some students prefer not to do this and instead can participate via the group chat. We are keeping this under review.

Why is my child not being set homework?

Keeping up with the full timetable delivered remotely is manageable, but demanding for most students. It is important during the closure that students have time to pursue interests and leisure activities. Those students who wish to do additional work can spend longer than suggested on the work set or can ask for extension work. Students in exam years can direct time to their own personal revision.

**Why is only some work given teacher feedback?**

Staff will normally use a range of methods to provide answers and feedback to students in class, which includes sharing answers and mark schemes, using quizzes, peer marking, self-assessment, whole-class feedback and marking of key pieces of work. This continues during the closure with a wide range of marking and feedback being used to help students progress. Using smart ways of feeding back and marking key pieces of work enables staff to continue to track student progress, as well as providing them with the time needed to spend planning and modifying their lessons for remote teaching.

Why have you said that the engagement information may contain anomalies?

Those teachers who teach only 1 hour per week in Key Stage 3 may have as many as 20 teaching groups to submit information for. This is a huge task that takes a number of hours and is conducted over the space of 3 days. Work that is sent in after the lesson it was due or submitted late in the evening on the day it is due may not have been seen before the engagement data for that class was completed. In order to get the information to parents in a timely fashion, it is not possible for it to go through the usual checks and balances. We apologise for any unintentional anomalies in the information provided.

My child is finding the online learning challenging – what can we do?

Encourage your child to stick to the routine of their timetable, taking breaks at the designated times and using their time at the evening and weekend to pursue interests and leisure activities. Encourage attendance at the tutor welfare checks and online lessons. We only ask that students do their best and we will support families where we can. If your child needs support with IT access, please contact the school. If you have concerns over the special educational needs of your child, then please contact the SEND department for advice. For all other queries, please contact the school via the main school email address: wfarr@williamfarr.lincs.sch.uk.