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Dear Parents, Carers and Students

(This is being sent to parents - please share with your children.)

As we end our 8th school week since the lockdown began (it seems so much longer), we are aware that there are 6 weeks until the end of term and that there is much speculation about what school may look like in September for the new academic year. I apologise for the length of this communication but as we prepare to have some contact with years 10 and 12 in school from 15th June, I am very conscious that remote learning remains the main vehicle for education in the weeks ahead and the sole vehicle for those in years 7-9. I would like to address some of the worries and concerns that some of you have.

I have had very open and honest communications with students and parents about your worries and fears. Some students who started out confidently with remote learning are starting, as time goes on, to find it more difficult to motivate themselves. Some parents who, similarly, have created successful routines and kept their children motivated, are finding it increasingly challenging to keep all the juggling balls in the air and are searching for solutions to make it work better. Behind it all are the fears and uncertainties that hover around so many aspects of our lives in the weeks and months ahead. We want answers; we want to plan as we have always planned and as we have taught you in school to plan.

Year 13 and year 11 students may feel unfulfilled, frustrated that you didn't get the chance to prove yourselves and that you have no choice but to wait for results that have been generated without your direct input through examinations. Your next steps may feel uncertain and you are having to generate your own activities for the summer months.

Some year 12 and year 10 students may be worried that you are not covering the examination specifications fast enough, others may feel overwhelmed by the work being set as we all strive to ensure that you will be in the best position possible for next summer. You know that you will be receiving one day of face to face contact in school from 15th June but you don't know yet what that will look like and what its impact will be.

In year 9 you have been fortunate to be able to start your option subjects (and drop your non-option ones) which you wouldn't have in normal times. But you know you will not be getting face to face teaching in school until September at the earliest which may be a little dispiriting.

In years 8 and 7 you are also aware that you will not be having any time in school until at least September and that can feel unsettling. In Year 7 you didn't quite finish two terms in your new

school! Remote learning may have been an interesting change at first but you may look out at the next 6 weeks and worry about how you will motivate yourself to keep going. You will be getting a report towards the end of term, so you have time to impress your teachers...

In addition to the overwhelming daily barrage of information, guidance and speculation about the pandemic, other news stories around the world feel even more unsettling than usual and we may feel frustrated that we cannot express our views or our solidarity as we might in normal times with our friends. We can find ourselves in a cycle of uncertainty, doubt and fear.

As I've said in my communications with students and parents, we each react in different ways and I don't have any more answers than you do but I can try to provide some advice and reassurance from the point of view of the school's approach.

It is important to share our concerns and any feelings of being unsettled with family and friends. The more you talk, the more you realise that many people share many of your feelings. There is comfort in numbers although we need to be aware of how things can escalate unhelpfully online sometimes, and it becomes our job to help to keep things in perspective.

The same applies to concerns over academic issues such as examination results, university places, coursework, or coverage of the specification. Students in schools across the country are all in the same position, in fact, sadly, many are probably in far worse positions because of their particular circumstances. We should remember that we are probably in a better position than most.

Remote learning concerns are difficult to address because everyone reacts differently. But what we do know is that to make a sense of progress and success more achievable, you must organise your time carefully and be ruthless in keeping to your plan. Divide your time evenly between subjects over the week so that you don't spend a disproportionate amount of time on one subject. In school you can't make your favourite lesson in school longer and your least favourite one shorter! You must keep to the same proportions at home and set clear cut off times.

Some of you may be convinced that everything would be easier if you had 'live' lessons with your teachers at set times of the day. Unfortunately, this is a 'the grass is greener on the other side of the fence' sentiment. There is a wider picture about 'live' lessons that is not as clear nor as positive as it first appears.

We have had the capability to do 'live' lessons since the beginning through our Google platform (Google Meet) but after careful research into what would provide safe, fair, accessible learning for all, we chose not to use live solutions. We have since been reviewing our approach regularly using feedback from students, parents and teachers and also using key research updates from the Educational Endowment Fund and the Department for Education. We are pleased that adapting and amending our methodology along the way is keeping closely in line with this current research.

There is some strong advice against live online teaching from a safeguarding standpoint. In addition, we need to consider the wide range of family circumstances that we serve; we cannot assume that every child in a household has exclusive access to a laptop or computer, a quiet private space or internet access of sufficient quality for live streaming, potentially for more than one person simultaneously. We also need to consider the range of home circumstances in which teachers find themselves. The demands of bringing together every pupil in a class, and their

teacher, at a specific time for a meaningful, glitch-free, live interaction are unreasonable for the anticipated benefits. The research we have studied emphasises that the quality of teaching is more important than the mode of delivery. Ensuring elements of effective teaching - eg. clear explanations, scaffolding, building upon prior learning, feedback - is more important than how or when they are provided.

Please be assured that we are making deliberate and carefully weighed decisions about the remote learning experience of your child and that we are constantly seeking feedback from students through their teachers and from conversations and emails with parents. I think we can be very optimistic about the weeks ahead but we need to be realistic about our expectations and follow the educational research.

Finally, may I reassure those in years 10 and 12 that you will receive all the information you need about your imminent face to face contact in school by the middle of next week. We are finalising risk assessments and action plans to ensure that the school is 'Covid-safe' for you. To help you begin planning, I can confirm that you will each be assigned one day on which to attend from 9.00 am to 2.50 pm each week from the week beginning 15th June. We will keep you in small groups and you will not be allowed to mix with other groups of students in order to minimise contact and mixing. The canteen will not be open so you will be expected to bring a packed lunch for your day in school. We are working hard to ensure that each day will be worthwhile for you and help to keep you on track with your remote learning on the other four days.

Thank you for bearing with me through this long communication. We are making strong progress together and need to keep to routines, adhere ruthlessly to a plan that spreads time evenly between subjects and keep looking for ways to keep it fresh.

Best wishes and keep safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Elphick', written in a cursive style.

Steve Elphick