

PRINCIPAL: S.W. BLACK, M.Sc.



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22nd May, 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian

As we approach our tenth week of lockdown, I hope that this finds you and your family safe and well.

Yesterday the Minister for Education, Peter Weir MLA, confirmed, as was broadly anticipated, that schools will remain closed, for all but the children of key workers, for the remainder of the academic year. He also indicated that current planning suggests there will be a phased return for pupils in 2020/2021 which "will involve a mixture of scheduled school attendance and learning at home". The prospect of some pupils, particularly those currently in Years 11 and 13, resuming school in late August was suggested though no dates for this have been proposed. I will write to you again when the detail of this becomes clearer.

I am sure that many of you are increasingly concerned about the long-term impact on your son/daughter of not attending school. Please be assured that, within Ballymena Academy, we share the Minister's ambition to open school to more pupils as soon as it is safe to do so. To that end, in the absence of clear guidance thus far from the Department of Education, we have undertaken a significant planning exercise which we trust will allow us, when the opportunity arises, to strike the right balance between the importance of getting pupils back into the classroom and doing this in a way that is as safe as possible. It is imperative that whatever measures are put in place, we will seek to ensure that parents, pupils and staff all have confidence that it is safe to return.

It is evident that the next academic year will commence with some form of learning continuing to take place at home. In a week which has seen "Thank a Teacher Day", in addition to thanking our teachers at this time for all that they are doing in this regard, I wish to record my thanks to each of you for the invaluable "teacher" role which you have played in advising, supporting and encouraging your son/daughter in on-line learning and in their academic development. Your support is deeply appreciated. The on-line programme will see some changes in the weeks ahead in order to facilitate consolidation of material and other new activities and information will be disseminated across the various year groups in due course.

I appreciate that this is an unsettling time for everyone and, while there are some common concerns such as the re-opening of schools, there are some issues which are very specific to individual year groups. In all cases, we will continue to forward any additional information which becomes available to us. However, if you have specific questions or concerns, please contact us at school.

With every best wish to you and your families.

Take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully,

S.W. Black (Principal)

