

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



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29th January, 2021.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I hope that this finds you and your family safe and well.

You will undoubtedly be aware that schools have been informed by the N.I. Executive that they will not re-open for face-to-face teaching before 8th March with the likelihood that the return date for Junior School pupils will be much later. As the First Minister indicated yesterday, this will be a disappointment for many but the public health situation continues to demand such action. It is pleasing to see that the weekly number of recorded cases of COVID-19 is falling and we trust that if this continues to be the case, some pupils will be able to return to school as suggested. In the interim, school continues to remain open to facilitate vulnerable and key workers' children. Any parents who wish to avail of the facility, and have not already done so, should contact us via the Google link [Supervision in school 1 Feb to 5 Mar 2021](#).

The feedback which I receive on on-line learning continues to be encouraging. While no remote learning and teaching platform can fully replace face-to-face teaching in the classroom, it is pleasing to learn of the continued commitment and progress of our pupils, supported and guided by the strenuous efforts of our staff. Our processes continue to evolve and Mr. N. Patterson (Vice-Principal) will provide additional information in a separate correspondence next week. In order to support the learning programme, supplementary hard-copy material has been created for pupils in Years 8 – 10 and I would wish to thank parents for collecting this material over the course of the week. It has been a worthwhile exercise and one which we may need to re-visit if the lockdown period is extended.

This week has been a busy week for our Careers Department with Year 10 careers interviews taking place alongside an assessment for the Quality in Careers Standard awarded to schools which can demonstrate the importance they place on careers and how they support students to make decisions about life after school. Having been the first school in N.I. to receive the award in 2017 we are delighted to, once again, be re-accredited at its highest level, the Gold Award. Those associated with Careers in Ballymena Academy are to be congratulated in receiving such high endorsement of their work.

Our Year 8 Parent Consultation Afternoon (by telephone) will take place on Thursday, 4th February, 2021 (2.00 – 4.30 p.m.) and details of the appointment process have already been forwarded to parents via ParentMail. Due to the Parent Consultation Afternoon, no on-line teaching will take place from 1.00 p.m. on that date. Parent Consultation Afternoons for parents of pupils in Year 11 and Year 13 will take place in March and further details will be provided in due course.

An announcement by the Education Minister on the awarding of grades at GCSE, 'AS' and 'A' level is expected next week and we trust that it will provide a fair and consistent mechanism for grading all qualifications. It appears most likely that the grading process will be based on teachers' assessment of "the standard at which a student is performing". As we await confirmation of decisions, pupils should continue to make best use of any opportunity to provide evidence of the standard of work of which they are capable in order that we have appropriate evidence to support the judgements which teachers will be required to make later this year. I appreciate that this is an anxious time for all involved and I hope that I will be able to provide greater clarity in the near future.

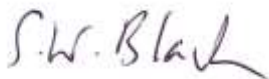
With post-primary transfer featuring heavily in the media, we published our Admissions Criteria for 2021 earlier this week. In developing the Admissions Criteria, the Board of Governors considered correspondence received from parents, legal advice, reports from meetings held with other schools, locally and nationally, and analysis of previous Year 8 intakes. Governors remain committed to the principle of academic selection but in this exceptional year, following careful consideration of the evidence available and taking cognisance of the decisions being made by other local post-primary schools, it concluded that our Admissions Criteria for this year will contain only non-academic criteria, together with evidence of registration for the AQE Common Entrance Assessment. We fully realise that the children have worked hard in preparing for the assessments and this is not how any of us would have wanted the transfer process to have worked this year. However, in the circumstances, we believe that the Admissions Criteria will provide a robust means to ensure that the vast majority of, if not all, children who would most likely have secured a place in Ballymena Academy, and for whom the Academy is their first preference, will be admitted.

The current public health situation makes it impossible to hold our normal “Open Nights” and on-line material, including a series of videos, has begun to be placed on our school website and our social media platforms. A virtual open event will be launched on the school website in early February and you may find this to be of interest.

Best wishes to you and your family.

Take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully,



S.W. Black (Principal)



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