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12th February, 2021.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

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

With the half-term break now upon us, we have just completed a period of six weeks remote learning for all pupils. I must congratulate the young people, encouraged and supported by yourselves, for their engagement and although we appreciate that nothing can truly replicate the classroom experience, much quality learning and teaching has occurred, albeit in a very different form. As indicated in correspondence from Mr. N. Patterson (Vice-Principal), the remote learning programme continues to evolve in line with the Department of Education guidance and our own observations and findings. In continuing to strive to improve our provision, we are asking pupils in Years 11 – 14 to reflect on their experiences of learning during this period and we would be grateful if you would encourage your son or daughter, if he/she has not already done so, to complete a short on-line questionnaire, the link to which is in their Year Group Google Classroom. Already a substantial number of pupils have responded and their responses will enable us to identify issues, both of best practice and areas for development, in order to evaluate and enhance our provision.

We await clarification from the N.I. Executive on the re-opening of schools, with an announcement anticipated in the near future. The continued fall in the weekly number of COVID-19 cases, together with the increase in number of vaccinations, indicates that it is likely that some, though probably not all, pupils will return to the classroom from 8th March. We trust that this will be the case and are planning for such an eventuality. I will provide you with an update once we have received, and considered, revised guidance from the Department of Education.

Our parental engagement continued last week with our Year 8 Parent Consultation Afternoon and we were delighted that, once again, over 90% of parents took the opportunity to speak to the teachers about their child's progress. The **Year 13** Parent Consultation Afternoon (by telephone) will take place on **Tuesday, 2nd March, 2021 (commencing at 2.00 p.m.)** with the **Year 11** Parent Consultation Afternoon scheduled for **Monday, 15th March, 2021**. Further details will be provided after the half-term holiday.

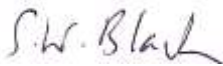
In 'lockdown', the work of the pastoral team can often go unnoticed but is an integral and essential part of the work of our school. Messages, in relation to issues such as health and well-being, continue to be relayed to pupils through Google Classroom and regular liaison takes place with a variety of organisations. Mr. R. Ross (Deputy Principal) has provided information, which you may find useful, in an appendix to this letter.

For our examination classes, we continue to await more detailed information from CCEA on the grading processes for GCSE, 'AS' and 'A' Level but we have put plans for assessment in place which seek to allow our pupils the best opportunity to attain the grades of which they are capable. Further information will be forwarded to parents of pupils in Years 12, 13 and 14 by Mr. N. Patterson (Vice-Principal).

In closing, I thank you for your continued support and offer my best wishes to you and your family for an enjoyable half-term break. I trust that all our young people will be able to take time away from study and their on-line devices so that they can return refreshed and re-energised for what, hopefully, will be the final block of remote learning.

Take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully,



S.W. Black (Principal)



Bronze

Literacy Support

The following link is to a free downloadable toolbar, which may be useful for some pupils who find some aspects of literacy more challenging: <https://www.texthelp.com/en-gb/sectors/education/leas-and-mats/northern-ireland-education-authorities/> The EA's Literacy Support Newsletter with additional support links can be found at: <https://sway.office.com/IOWgF2uVh2jGguBv?ref=Link>

Laptop Scheme

The EA's scheme for provision of loaning laptops to disadvantaged families continues to be rolled out. We have been able to facilitate some families through the initial round and will hopefully be able to do so again. Eligible families have now been contacted, with returns to be submitted by Monday, 15th February.

Take 5 Steps to Wellbeing

We continue to promote the '5 Steps to Wellbeing' approach in support of positive mental health for our pupils. The guidance, of course, extends to adults as well and can be found at: <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/sites/default/files/2020-02/Take%205%20Leaflet%2001%202020.pdf> Recently, pupils also had opportunity to focus on positive methods of promoting their own wellbeing during Children's Mental Health Week: <https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/>

Online Safety

The importance of being mindful of our young people's online safety is particularly important during this period of lockdown where there is an increase in 'screen time'. We would continue to encourage parents to be mindful of this and would also encourage you to download the DENI recommended app which will help support you towards a better understanding of some of the issues around online safety. This can be found via: <https://ineqe.com/safer-schools-ni/> Our pupils also had the chance to consider some of these issues with a focus on Safer Internet Day: <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/safer-internet-day/2021>

Counselling Support Services

The School Counsellor and Occupational Therapist remain active, supporting some of our pupils via telephone calls. Information about the services and how to refer, is available to our pupils via their HoY Google Classroom or they can contact their Head of Year via this classroom also during term time. If parents wish to refer directly to the counselling service, the Familyworks referral form can be accessed via: <https://familyworksni.com/>

Family Support NI

Family Support NI provides a comprehensive list and information about support services available to families in our local area: <https://www.familysupportni.gov.uk/>