

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

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15<sup>th</sup> January, 2021.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I hope that this finds you and your family safe and well. Much has happened in our society, and especially in education, since the New Year but perhaps the recent drop in the number of daily recorded cases of COVID-19 and the encouraging news relating to the roll-out of a vaccine offer encouragement that we are taking tentative steps back towards normality. It is to be hoped that this will permit some, if not all, pupils to return safely to face-to-face teaching in school after Half-Term.

Meanwhile, school remains open to facilitate vulnerable and key workers' children and any parents who wish to avail of this facility should contact us via the Google link [Supervision in school 11 Jan to 12 Feb 2021](#), if you have not already done so. You may have noticed in the media that school meals are not being provided in Education Authority Schools during the 'lockdown'. However, as a Voluntary Grammar School, and thanks to the efforts of Mrs. H. Gordon, School Meals Supervisor, this is not the case in Ballymena Academy and this is much appreciated by the children, and staff, currently in school.

As stated, during the previous 'lockdown', it is vital that we continue to do what we can to support our key workers, especially those who are risking so much to support us. We are thankful and appreciative of those within our community who are in the frontline of these efforts; you are very much in our thoughts at this time.

Our monitoring of Google Classroom indicates that the vast majority of pupils are now well-engaged with the on-line learning platform. This is pleasing, reflecting positively not only upon the efforts of your child but of your support at this time. Recent guidance from the Department of Education and from Ofsted indicates clearly that pupils benefit from a variety of remote teaching methods. Our programme seeks to reflect this, with teachers working strenuously to provide engagement in a number of ways, while recognising that no remote learning and teaching platform can truly replicate the effectiveness of face-to-face teaching in a classroom.

In order to support remote learning, distribution of hard copy material to pupils in Years 11 – 14 has taken place. A similar exercise will now be undertaken with pupils in other Year Groups and additional hard copy material will be made available during the week commencing 25<sup>th</sup> January. Further details will be provided in due course.

This week saw our Parent Consultation Afternoon (by telephone) for parents of pupils in Year 10 and I was delighted that over 90% of parents took the opportunity to speak to teachers about their child's progress and of the GCSE choices process. A similar event will take place for parents of pupils in Year 8 on Thursday, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2021 – details of the appointment process will be forwarded to parents by Mr. T. McLeister (Vice-Principal). With the GCSE choices process under way, we will soon commence a similar process for Sixth Form with information being forwarded to Year 12 pupils (and parents) in the near future.

For our pupils in Years 11 – 14, while there is certainty that no external examinations will take place this summer, there remains uncertainty as to the exact manner in which GCSE, 'AS' and 'A' level grades will be awarded. However, it is evident that grades will be based on teacher professional judgement and that schools will be expected to have evidence to support the judgements which its teachers make. My advice to all our pupils, while we await clarification of the process, is to continue to engage fully with their learning and to make best use of any opportunity in which they can demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and skills. As a school, we will seek, within the parameters of the process, to provide evidence which reflects positively upon our young people and enables them to get the grades which their work merits. After the shambolic

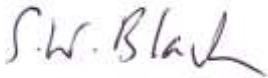
circumstances in which grades were awarded by Examination Boards last year, we hope that a fair and consistent way of grading all qualifications will emerge which allows the achievements of young people to be appropriately recognised and to permit them to progress to the next stage of their lives without hindrance. As further information becomes available we will continue to update you.

In closing, I thank you for all of your support and encouragement; it remains invaluable in such a period of uncertainty.

Best wishes to you and your family.

Take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully,



S.W. Black (Principal)



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