



BORDEN GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Borden Grammar School
Avenue of Remembrance
Sittingbourne
ME10 4DB

6 January 2021

Dear Parent or Carer,

I am sure you will be aware that our original plans for the start of term have now been overridden by the national lockdown. We have been told that schools will be closed until the February half term when the decision will be subject to review. Similarly, the plans for mass testing in schools have been placed on hold until students return to school. I have to say that having received boxes full of thousands of tests, the enormity of the logistics to make the mass testing work in such a short time had really hit home, but we would have done our best. However, it is important to note that the school remains open for any vulnerable students and children of critical workers and staff remain entirely contactable. In the interests of setting out clear expectations early on, I will attempt to run through a few essential pieces of information in this letter, that will also need careful communication to your child.

Exams

We were told last night that exams will not go ahead as currently planned. The government is liaising with Ofqual to decide what this may look like, but it is likely this will be different to the centre assessed grades provided by teachers last year. It is possible that there will be some 'thinned down' exams, or that they will take some kind of in class monitored assessments (as intended in Wales) or that there will be some kind of teacher grades moderated by supplying evidence - or a mix of all of them. Any of these options means that the works that students now produce really matters. This will likely be to the benefit of students that are self motivated and able to work independently, but will likely be detrimental to those that are not. We must therefore work together to make sure that those in the second group complete their work and sticking to a normal timetable as much as possible is the best way of making this happen. On this note, we have already had a number of year 11 or 13 students ask their teachers what they are going to predict them. Teachers will neither be able or allowed to do this. Students should have a good idea of their current ability from feedback and prior reports, but the fundamental key to getting better predictions, is simply to work harder!

Remote Learning

Remote learning should look very different to how it did in the first lockdown. From next week teachers have been asked to provide some interaction in every lesson. This may involve talking through powerpoints, watching videos or other activities. Tasks will be set with the expectation that the student work is uploaded to Google Classroom. Some teachers and students will have more experience at doing this and some will find this works better for them than others, but the goal is for the timetable to be largely the same. We are now using Edulink to register your child at these sessions and you will be able to access Edulink and see whether your child has attended. We have systems in place now for staff to follow up where students fail to attend lessons, making sure there is a valid reason rather than simply not engaging. This will involve escalation from teachers, to subject leaders and/or heads of year and beyond. **It is therefore vitally important that your child treats their timetable as a normal school day.** The only difference will be that where a student has a breaktime in the middle of the lesson, when the lesson may well simply continue through this break and stop earlier. The lessons are also likely to be shorter than they would normally be in person; firstly because it is unreasonable to expect a child to sit in front of a computer non stop for 5 hours and secondly, because we are prioritising staff follow up for non attendance after each lesson. We believe that more regular, more interactive sessions are the key to maintaining engagement over a longer period.



Headteacher: Mr A Tomlin MA NPQH



There may be occasions when our remote learning has no interaction, for instance as a result of staff illness or because staff are supervising key worker children etc. We will try to notify you of this in advance but please contact the teacher or subject leader if you have any concerns.

Safeguarding and Wellbeing

We also realise that it is harder to safeguard our students when they are not in school. We will therefore be asking our tutors to be in weekly contact with their tutee's. This can be via email or phone, but we would certainly expect some phone contact to take place during the course of this half term. The questions they will be asking will be things like "Are you well? Are you accessing the work ok? Do you need any support?". **Please ask your child to prioritise responding to this communication** as we take it very seriously. Again, were we to not hear from a child, then an escalation process would be put into practice so that we can be certain everything is alright. We will be continuing with weekly assemblies and will be using positive (and negative) behaviour points for work related feedback. All of this is intended to support the mental health of your child, but also to keep them focused on learning. They must understand that any gaps in learning will have an impact on their potential and we need to work together to try and help them focus on short term happiness over long term suffering. In order to support any students with their mental health over this period, there are a variety of resources available and I have included a list at the bottom of this letter. Our in-house support is through the wellbeing@bordengrammar.kent.sch.uk email which goes directly to our designated safeguarding lead. We can also refer students to our school counsellor if needed and they will still be actively looking at ways to support students already referred. A Safeguarding Lead will always be in school and can be contacted through the main telephone number in school hours, and also via the Confidential mail account: confidential@bordengrammar.kent.sch.uk (mail checked in school opening hours).

Free School Meals and ICT

If your child normally receives free school meals, then we will be supplying you with vouchers (since our catering staff are now furloughed). We realise that some families may find the ICT demands an issue and have a small stock of machines we may be able to loan to families. If this is you, please don't suffer in silence and contact the relevant Head of Year for your child.

I will continue to communicate with you regularly during this period but it may not be on the weekly basis that has seemed to make sense up to now. We are intending on creating a 'learning in lockdown' tab on our website where all things Covid related can be placed and will let you know when this is available. Whilst no remote education system will ever be a replacement for attending school, we are hoping that the experience this time around will show the hard work that has taken place to make the experience a better one for your child. Please keep communicating with us and let us know if we can do any more to support your child at this difficult time.

Kind regards



Ashley Tomlin
Headteacher

Enc. Mental Health Support Resources

Mental Health Support

Kooth - can be accessed via website or via the app and students/parents can self refer for help, it doesn't need to go through a doctor or school referral process: it is also picked up by trained counsellors to support the student.

www.kooth.com

Young Minds offers a similar service to Kooth but the support is 'supported' by trained professionals rather than counsellors actually supporting the students.

youngminds.org.uk

MIND are offering free virtual wellbeing sessions (out of school hours) for young people to combat stress, deal with emotions and reduce anxiety in order to enhance resilience. Further information and enrolment onto the course can be found at:

<https://www.maidstonemind.org/virtual-bounce-back-courses/> MIND also provide information on how to access support and services for a range of issues such as abuse, bereavement, mental health, housing and benefits:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/>

Making Miracles are a local charity supporting young people and families through loss and bereavement, particularly as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. They have offered 6 FREE bereavement counselling sessions to any young person who may benefit from it. This is not explicit to COVID being the cause of a loss, but is open to anyone who has lost during COVID from other causes. www.makingmiracles.org.uk

Further information can be found at the **Kent Resilience Hub**.

kentresiliencehub.org.uk/resources/cruse-bereavement-care-support-for-children-and-young-people/