

30<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Dear Parents/Carers,

As you will know, the Secretary of State for Education recently announced that we can expect to see a full time return to school for all pupils in all year groups in September. This would be excellent news and the prospect of seeing all of our pupils again is something we are all looking forward to. I know that all staff who have been teaching in school since the start of our phased return for Year 10 pupils and Year 12 students, have thoroughly enjoyed the chance to get back into the classroom to teach, as opposed to interacting virtually. In addition, the Prime Minister has also announced a change to certain social distancing measures. We are still awaiting further details from the Department for Education (DfE) as to what this will mean, in practice, for schools in September. This guidance will be well-received as it will be impossible for any secondary school to apply “bubbles” to provide a “normal” curriculum offer in any year group. The reason I say this is that, as you are aware, pupils are taught in different sets and groups in Years 7 - 9 and have a range of options in Years 10 - 13. This means that every pupil has an individual timetable, rather than a class timetable as is the case in primary schools. In the event that we do still have to maintain a bubble system, we would have to adjust how we teach. In addition, in order to be able to fit all pupils into the classroom spaces that we have, we would need to reduce social distancing to less than 1 metre. With the current restrictions in place, we can only fit 7 pupils in a classroom at any one time. As a group of local headteachers, we have written to the Secretary of State seeking clarification and further guidance as soon as possible, and I would hope to hear more in the near future. Whilst the end of term is fast approaching, September is still some time away and we will, of course, respond to whatever guidance we get from the DfE so as to ensure the safety of all our pupils and staff. As soon as further guidance is released, I will write again with more information about returning to school after the summer break. Should this information not have been made available before the last day of term, I will inform you and also give an indication of when I will update you during the Summer Holidays.

### Online Lessons

As you are aware we have, over the course of the last few days, been offering pupils, in all year groups, the opportunity to join a range of live-streamed lessons. This has taken a huge amount of planning and preparation, but has gone incredibly well, albeit that we have inevitably had a few teething problems with the technology. The programme of live-streamed lessons will continue until the end of term. We are in the process of trialling a more interactive programme with our Year 12 students, and we may consider increasing the level of interactivity across all year groups, in the coming weeks. I will continue to update you on this in due course. As I am sure you can appreciate, the school is trying its best to accommodate socially distanced lessons for Year 10 and Year 12, remote learning for all year groups and the introduction of live lessons. Staff have been directed to set less work remotely for those subjects receiving live lessons, however what may happen over the remaining two and a half weeks is there may be variations in the amount of work set on particular days, although across each week the amount should stay the same. As such, please reassure your child that they should not be working beyond 3:00 pm if they have not finished remote work due to their live lessons. They can complete it on subsequent days – staff are aware of this and happy to receive the work later. To reiterate, the golden rule is that students should not be working beyond 3:00 pm which would be equivalent to their normal school day.

## Summer Examinations 2020/2021

There has been some discussion in the House of Commons about moving next summer's examination season back to a point later in the school year. As it stands, we simply do not know if this will happen, and if it does, how it might work in practice. I would suggest that, for now, it may be best if you do not book any summer holidays until the position has been clarified. It is unlikely that the exams would be moved beyond the anticipated Local Authority end of term dates, i.e. Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021, which is, at present, later than our current end of term date. I will advise you of the position as soon as further details on the summer exam programme is available.

## Induction/Transition into Year 7

We are in the process of finalising our induction plans for the new pupils who will be joining us in September. We are very mindful that starting secondary school can be a stressful and daunting experience, and we are disappointed that we are not able to run our usual extensive induction programme to welcome our new Year 7s to Sweyne Park. However, we do have a number of plans in place to do the very best we can to take away some of the stress and to allow new pupils to get a taste of what life will be like when they join us. This includes sending a number of induction packs to each of our new intake, booklets to cover frequently answered questions and visiting as many of our local primaries as we can. Most exciting of all is that we are going to record a video which our new pupils will be able to access, to allow them to see the school, get some more information, and meet their tutors. All being well, on the first day of the new term, we are planning to welcome back just our new Year 7s as well as our Year 12s, who also haven't experienced any induction to the new phase in their education.

## Exams Results Days

In line with local agreement, this year, exam results will be emailed to pupils and students, on the day that they are released, this is 13<sup>th</sup> August for A-Levels and 20<sup>th</sup> August for GCSEs. I appreciate that this is far from ideal, and we will of course be offering individual follow-up meetings for pupils and students who need additional support and guidance. Further details on this will be published shortly.

## Appealing GCSE and A-level Grades

I have set out below guidance from Ofqual, which provides that there are very few circumstances in which a pupil will be able to appeal the grade awarded to them. However, Ofqual has advised that any pupil who feels their grades do not reflect their ability will have the opportunity to take their examination(s) in the coming autumn, or the following summer.

### ***"Can students appeal these grades?"***

*We are committed to doing all that we can to make sure students are not disadvantaged by these unprecedented circumstances, including allowing for an appeal where appropriate. In line with the direction given to us by the Secretary of State for Education, appeals will be allowed in cases where a centre believes it has made an error when submitting its information; or similarly, if the centre believes an exam board made a mistake when calculating, assigning or communicating a grade. Additionally, a student who had evidence of bias or discrimination should raise this with their centre. They could also pass such evidence on to the exam board who could investigate for potential malpractice. Following our consultation, we have given serious consideration as to whether a student could appeal against their school or college's centre assessment grades and position in the rank order. On balance,*



*we have decided it would not be in the interests of all students, or the fairness of the arrangements overall, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the appeal would have to be undertaken by someone better placed than the student's teachers to judge the grade they would likely have received if the exams had taken place – in the unique circumstances of this summer we do not believe there is any such person. An appeal would also require students to have access to the information their school or college put forward before being submitted to exam boards. This may compromise the reliability of this year's approach. Furthermore, if one student successfully appealed against their position in the rank order, it would have negative implications for other students who would, in turn, need to be given an opportunity to appeal. We intend that students who feel that their grades from the summer do not reflect their ability will have the opportunity to take their exams in the autumn series or in summer 2021. If they choose to do this, students will be able to use the higher of the two grades for future progression."*

Further information can be found in the document produced by Ofqual entitled "Guidance for teachers, students, parents and carers" which is available on our website.

I will continue to keep you updated as soon as I have more clarity on the matters referred to above. In the meantime, I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your ongoing support during this incredibly difficult and ever changing time. We have been extremely proud of how our pupils have conducted themselves with such maturity and respect as they get used to working with the blended programme of online lessons, work set on SMHW, and, for our Year 10s and 12s, classroom based learning.

I am sure, like us, you are all looking forward to a return to normality, hopefully in the not too distant future. In the meantime, stay safe.

Kind regards



Katharine Dines  
Headteacher

