

22 October 2020

Dear Parent/ carer

I wanted to write to you again as the half-term break approaches.

Start to the new school year

Teachers and support staff have been delighted with the way students have returned to school since September. In most cases they have been enthusiastic and seemingly happy to be back and we have enjoyed working with them.

Despite the difficult circumstances caused by the Covid pandemic it has been a very good half-term with most students settled, working hard and a great atmosphere around school. We have been able to provide the full curriculum even though some lessons have to be taught in non-specialist rooms. While not able to return to the full range of extra-curricular activities, staff have provided after-school clubs and activities where possible including sports, drama, art and Duke of Edinburgh events. Last weekend 48 students undertook their assessed bronze Duke of Edinburgh expedition and all have passed – congratulations to these students and thanks to the 11 staff members giving up their weekend to accompany them.

HMI inspection

Measures to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus have been observed well by students. Last Friday we had an inspection by Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) as part of a national inspection sample of schools. I am pleased to say that feedback was only positive with the school praised for the measures in place and way this has been approached.

Face covering

Having said this, we are not complacent. There is a rising level of infection rates nationally and locally and with the weather turning colder and wetter, now is the time to introduce a further measure which is the wearing of a face covering. Students were told yesterday that for the next few days we are asking them to wear a face covering in indoor spaces where social distancing is difficult eg corridors and wet weather areas. From Monday 2 November this will be mandatory for students and staff unless there is an underlying medical reason why a face covering should not be worn. The exception is at break-times if eating or drinking.

It is regrettable that this additional measure is now needed but I believe that this is the case. I am pleased that we have been able to start the school year without face coverings because life is a lot pleasanter when we can see each other's face and when we are not encumbered by a face covering. This has helped ensure term has started so well.

Face coverings can be plain or patterned but must not carry offensive slogans or inappropriate images. For reasons of hygiene, a face covering should be washed regularly or a fresh disposable one used.

C Beds Council has asked that you receive the attached letter from them. It contains important public health information.

Progress reports

Y11 have received the first progress report of the year. These were sent out by email and then hard copy was issued direct to students including a copy of the Y11 Information booklet full of information about GCSEs.

In the absence of our traditional subject consultation evening for parents/ carers to meet teachers, we have included brief comments on the report this time round. This will be repeated for all year groups as progress reports are sent out next half term. In Y9 we hold a tutor event on Thursday 5 November. Y9 parents/carers will shortly receive a further communication about arrangements for this event.

Exams

We moved Y13 exams that were missed in the summer to this week. These have gone well and students will receive feedback after the half-term break. All Y11 mock GCSE exams will now take place in December with a second round later in the spring term as the government has announced that public exams this summer will be later than usual. Provisionally, A Level and GCSE exams will now take place between 7 June and 2 July apart from the first papers in English and maths at GCSE which will be held in the week beginning 24 May. I must emphasise that the dates remain provisional and so are subject to change. It is important that holidays are not booked for the exam period because public exams cannot be repeated until the following year.

A Level results day has been moved from Thursday 12 August to Tuesday 24 August. GCSE results day has been moved from Thursday 19 August to Friday 27 August. That will be a busy week!

It is our view that most students in Y11 and Y13 are not “behind” in their studies. Some material has been removed from some courses and will not be examined and we are 8 months away from exam time, time in which students will be very well taught and very well prepared to sit their exams. We understand the anxiety felt by some but we have been greatly encouraged to see how much study so many students completed during the March-July lockdown and how seriously they are taking their studying now. Students should be reassured.

Energy drinks

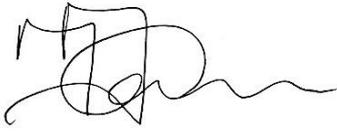
It has come to our attention that some students are consuming energy drinks on the way to school and others are bringing cans of energy drink into school. These drinks are incredibly unhealthy and produce an immediate “high”, a sugar and caffeine rush, followed by a subsequent “low”. This is quite noticeable in the behaviour and the ability to concentrate seen in some students.

These drinks have always been banned from school but seem to be creeping back. I am seeking your support in stopping this. Any such drinks found in school will be confiscated.

Finally I would like to thank you for your continuing support during what are challenging times for all of us. Your feedback continues to be instrumental in our understanding of how certain aspects of school operate and help us to make necessary adjustments. Your comments and feedback are always taken seriously and followed up.

We have 1301 students on roll as of today. Staff are working hard to support all of our young people. We do this best when we are able to work together.

I hope that your son/daughter is able to get a rest and a good break next week and will return ready to start again on Monday 2 November.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Carroll', with a stylized, cursive script.

Tim Carroll