17th April 2020

Dear parents/guardians

Firstly, I trust this letter finds your family, your friends and of course yourself safe and well. I am aware that some of you may well now know people who have Covid-19 and I hope that they are able to make a speedy and full recovery.

I would also like to pass on my sincerest thanks for all of the positive feedback over the past few weeks. The e-mail messages, Facebook messages and those within our recent survey have been welcomed and appreciated by all staff. I have always been very open about the difficulties faced of literally trying to build a virtual school overnight whilst also trying to support individual boys, families and of course the outgoing year 11. As parents, your support has made that process so much easier.

Thank you to all of you that were able to complete the survey about setting work. There were just short of one hundred responses which means we have got a pretty accurate picture of the issues faced by boys and parents, what has worked well and what needs refining. Not surprisingly, there was a mixed response as to whether you would prefer daily shorter tasks being set, or project work. Around 50% of you reported that you would like a mixture of both. However, within that, many asked if project work itself could be broken down into smaller chunks of work, as sometimes they appeared overwhelming. What was also clear was that many of you were struggling to prioritise which subject to do on any given day with many of you defaulting to English and maths (Hegarty maths has proved popular), whichever subject has the nearest deadline or whichever subject interested your son the most. Understandably, many of you were concerned about this. However, as long as work is being completed then do not worry. This is a similar approach I am adopting with my own son.

Without giving an exhaustive list I thought it may be useful to share some of the common themes/concerns if only to help you realise you are not alone:

* The amount of work set on SMH is overwhelming
* Lack of access to suitable IT including many demands from other family members for a laptop, not actually having a laptop/PC, large documents difficult to view on phones etc
* How to prioritise subjects and tasks
* My son needs support which I cannot always give because I am working from home/I am a key worker
* Difficulties understanding what is required or being asked for
* Difficulties getting into a routine, understanding expectations
* The stress of a new alert from SMH ‘pinging’ on the phone/tablet
* Not sure how to hand work in, knowing if it has been received
* Creative/outside tasks welcome but not everyone has a garden
* The boys finding working at home difficult and adjusting has been tough
* Some parents just do not understand the work themselves enough to help
* More structure for the day needed
* Not all online platforms work reliably
* Do not have access to a printer
* Paper booklets welcomed

There were many positive comments and most of you clearly appreciated the effort staff have been putting in to publish the work and were grateful for the feedback received either by e-mail, through SMH or from telephone conversations with staff.

With the above in mind and the announcement yesterday that we will remain in lockdown for at least three more weeks, we are going to change how the work is set after Easter. We will not be moving to daily ‘taught’ lessons where everyone has to be logged on at the same time for each subject. This is because many of you reported access to ICT as being a key issue, and the feedback from many schools that trialled this approach was that less than 50% of students were actually logging on at the allocated time, even in many independent schools. We are however going to trial this with some lessons in Year 10 and we hope to have started to deliver the first lessons in this way mid-way through the second week after Easter. The remainder of Year 10 work will be set in the usual way. Years 7-9 will have work largely set in the usual way however there will be two key changes. Firstly, I set out below a suggested timetable of when work for each subject should be attempted. Secondly staff have been asked to break longer project-based work down into smaller chunks so that it is easier to see what is required and so that it will be less overwhelming for boys and parents. The suggested timetable can be seen below:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Mon** | **Tue** | **Wed** | **Thur** | **Fri** |
| **Year7** | **English/Latin**Geography | **Maths****Science**IT | **English/Latin**MathsDT | **Maths**ScienceArt | **English/Latin**History |
| **Year 8** | **English**GeographyHorticulture | **Maths****Science**IT | **English****Maths** DT | **Maths****Science**Art | **English**HistoryAgriculture |
| **Year 9** | **English**GeographyHorticulture | **Maths****Science**IT | **English****Maths**DT | **Maths****Science**Art | **English**HistoryAgriculture |
| **Year 10** | To continue with the current arrangements with a more bespoke timetable to be finalised next week. |
| Years 7-9: Suggested time between 20 minutes and 1 hour per subject. Those struggling may need to complete less than this. **Reading** time is in addition to the above and should be done every day. This is guidance only and please do not worry if on some/all days this is not possible. |

Please note the above is the *suggested* timetable and subjects can be moved around. It is not the day the work will be set but the day it needs to be worked on. Staff will set ‘hand in’ dates however we will ensure there is some flexibility with these and sanctions will not be set for not completing tasks. The best way to hand in work is by e-mail. The key stage 3 booklets and periodic challenges set can be completed instead of, or in addition to, the above. Priority should be given to those subjects and tasks in **bold**.

**In summary**

* Clearer (suggested) daily timetable provided
* Longer tasks to be broken down into smaller chunks
* Daily expectations provided to support but are for guidance only
* Hand in dates provided as a guide, but will be flexible
* Decision taken not to move to daily scheduled lessons for the whole school due to concerns already raised about lack of IT access. The above provides more flexibility.
* Staff, including SLT, will continue to be available to provide support either through SMH, e-mail or telephone (please see previous letters for contact details)

We had a staff meeting yesterday and staff reported that the best way to hand work in is by e-mail (see previous letter for e-mail addresses) and staff agreed to try and take existing extended projects and break them down into chunks. Staff will start to work on this and you should see this happening from next week.

For Year 10, we will be delivering some ‘taught’ lessons where boys will need to be logged on at a set time and the teacher will be available to answer questions. This requires some staff training, software development and trialling before we can launch this. It is our intention to try and introduce a new timetable with some taught lessons for Year 10 from the 30th April. We appreciate that this approach may well exclude some boys due to a lack of IT access. However, the work will also be posted on SMH.

I would also like to update you on a number of other key decisions that have been made recently. We have taken the decision to cancel Work Experience for Year 10 and Activities Week with a decision on Open Day yet to be made. The present uncertainty and the long lead in times needed to organise these events mean that they are no longer viable, even if restrictions are lifted nearer the time. We will be writing to all of the parents of Year 9 boys soon as we intend to start the option process after Easter. It will prove a challenge to complete this remotely. However, Mrs Davis is working on a means of providing boys and parents with the information and support they need to make the right subject choices for next year.

**My latest Vlog will be available later on the school website and on the school facebook page which should complement this letter.**

During ‘normal times’ one of the challenges teachers face every day is trying to ensure all boys make progress, that the more able are stretched and that others are not left behind. That is difficult enough when boys have the same teacher, same facilities and the same access to support staff and resources. In the current situation boys have different ‘teachers’ (or in some cases no teacher), different access to IT (again in some cases no access to IT) and different levels of support from other family members. Unsurprisingly, boys are now all at very different stages in completing the work set. At Brymore historically we have admitted boys in Year 9 and therefore have experience of taking in boys who have developed at different rates in their various primary schools. I therefore have every confidence in the staff here to ensure that all boys will catch up and the effects of any loss of learning will be minimised on their return. That is what we have always done well at Brymore, so please do not worry unduly about the amount of work being completed at home.

Thank you once again for you continued support as we continue to work together to do what is best for the boys. I wish to stress yet again that everything in this letter is intended as a support for you in these difficult times. If for whatever reason your son is unable to access or complete much of the work set then please do not hesitate to contact us for support but also rest assured staff will work hard when the boys return to make sure the effects of any work missed is minimised. It is our job to teach and your job to parent. We appreciate your support in helping us do our job at this time.

Please stay safe and with best wishes.

Mark Thomas

Headteacher