

21<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians

I would like to start by thanking you for your continued support, patience and understanding as we keep on responding and adapting to the ever-changing situation with Covid-19. The aim of this letter is to outline my position and that of Brymore moving forward, in an attempt to provide some degree of certainty in an incredibly uncertain time for parents and schools nationally. I also felt that it was important that this letter goes to everyone within the Brymore family, including the soon to be Year 7 boys and those leaving us in Year 11.

At the time of writing, there has been no government guidance for secondary schools other than to plan to re-open at some point after the 1<sup>st</sup> of June, as long as key conditions have been met. I am led to believe that there may be some announcement regionally in the South West, after 28<sup>th</sup> May and that currently the R value in the region is high, at 0.76. I also understand that the 'track and trace' system is unlikely to be ready and functioning by 1<sup>st</sup> June. Guidance has been released for primary schools and worryingly it does suggest that schools should re-open even if they can not achieve social distancing. This contradicts everything we are being asked to do, whilst out shopping or exercising.

I have no intention of getting involved in any political argument over this and instead will continue to focus on ensuring I do all that I can to keep the Brymore family safe. This includes boys, their families, staff and their families. Therefore, I will only re-open Brymore in a way that I feel is safe. Moreover, I am very aware we all have very different home circumstances which is why all those who are eligible to return have been given a choice with no fear of fines or chasing by the school for non-attendance. I am also aware that for most boarders there is no choice to return due to where they live and I am also mindful that Years 7-9 are not being given the option to return. It is through taking all of this into account that we have devised the proposed programme. I remain convinced that no Brymore boy will be disadvantaged academically, compared to other students nationally and those who do not return will receive the same academic programme as those that do.

## **Year 11**

Boys in year 11 would normally now be in the middle of their examinations. Staff are currently starting to enter the predicted grades ready to submit to the exam boards after half term. The guidance from Ofqual states that the results of each department in a school will be standardised effectively, ensuring schools cannot artificially inflate their grades. The key data used to do this will be the prior attainment of each individual boy and the historical performance of each subject nationally over the past two years. Fortunately, the performance of many subjects at Brymore has been incredibly strong for a number of years, which will favour the boys this year. I remain committed to providing a suitable leavers service at some point in the future.

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### **Year 10**

We gave all parents the choice whether they wanted their son to return or not. On a personal level I have made the choice not to send my own son back to primary school however as the Headteacher I felt it was essential that individual parents should make their own choice without fear of being disadvantaged. Just over half of parents have chosen not to send their son back to school when we partially re-open after half term. The attendance of year 10 to lessons on Microsoft Teams continues to be excellent (over 90%) and well above the national average (as low as 20% in some schools). We therefore decided that this successful and safe way of teaching should continue which means all boys receive the same academic programme. Those that do wish to return will be welcomed back for one afternoon a week between 2.00pm and 3.45pm in small groups of 8-9 boys which will be the same each week to facilitate easier self-isolation should one boy present with symptoms. No lessons will be delivered but boys will have a chance to do some sport, help in the gardens or be helped with work they are finding difficult. This programme is likely to start on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June and further details will be sent separately.

### **Year 9**

We brought the option process forward so that boys could continue to work from home on those subjects that they were intending to continue to study next year and not spend time on those that they weren't. We now intend to extend the 'teaching' using Microsoft Teams into year 9, to include one lesson a week in each core and option subject. This is likely to start on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> June and further details and a timetable will be sent separately.

### **Years 7-8**

We will continue to provide work on Show My Homework. However, I am concerned about the effect the prolonged absence will have on many boys socially and in terms of their mental health. We therefore intend to start a tutorial programme using Microsoft Teams for 30 minutes a week starting on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June where boys will have contact with a member of staff and other boys within their tutor group. Further details and timings will be sent out separately.

### **Year 6**

Moving up to secondary school is unsettling at the best of times and I appreciate this will be even more challenging without our usual induction process. We have already started to make contact with primary schools to get the information we need and we have started the process of phoning parents. We are planning an alternative induction programme and parents will be contacted separately about this after half term.

### **Boarders**

We have deliberately devised the academic programme so that it does not disadvantage boys whose parents are unwilling or unable to send them back to school. We are already working hard to plan for the anticipated full return of boarders in September. Clearly at this stage I can not guarantee that. However it is something we are keen to achieve. Unfortunately, we have recently had to furlough the majority of boarding staff and so some parents may have a different member of staff contacting them after 1<sup>st</sup> June.

### **Additional support**

We contacted all parents of all boys who are entitled to additional support as part of their EHCP and nearly all said they did not want their son to return to school at this stage. Many boys are now receiving interventions in small groups using Microsoft Teams and I know they value being able to talk to staff and their friends. Others are receiving one to one support in a similar way.

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### **General support for all**

We have tried to ensure that as many parents as possible receive phone calls from staff on a regular basis, depending on need. We have also tried to balance the needs of all boys. We could, for example, have those Year 10s who wish to return in more regularly. However, that would be at the expense of other Year 10s having lessons on Microsoft Teams. We were also determined that all boys have the opportunity for some contact with staff and other boys, which is why we are extending the use of Microsoft Teams into the lower year groups.

Over the next few days further letters will be coming out depending on year group to outline how the new arrangements will work. Please understand that this is all subject to change as the government still have not said that officially the conditions have been met for schools to re-open, which means that neither you, nor the school can plan with any real certainty.

I must finish by acknowledging the hard work and dedication of all of the staff at Brymore. Many are also struggling with home schooling, dealing with vulnerable relatives or are indeed vulnerable themselves. They have had to learn to teach remotely by being taught remotely which for many is way outside their comfort zone. Many are putting in 12-14-hour days to planning lessons, contacting home, being in school as required, setting work, answering queries from boys and parents as well as attending the various meetings that are necessary each week. I know many are exhausted, as I am sure many parents are also. I therefore have asked staff to treat half-term as a half term. Work will not be set, and we do not expect boys to complete any home schooling. If there is work set on SMH please assume the deadline is for the following week. Of course, staff will be planning for re-opening. However, I hope that staff, boys and parents alike manage to get some respite from the demands of home-schooling next week. I am proud of the response of everyone connected with Brymore over the past few weeks and I look forward to the time when we can welcome all boys back. Please keep in contact and watch out for another staff appearance across our social media platforms soon.

Please continue to take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully  
MARK THOMAS  
Headteacher