



Newtownhamilton High School

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Dear Parent/Guardian

Please find below some important updates that I ask you to share with your child/children.

Return to School

Unfortunately, the road map published by the NI Executive this week did not provide us with any further dates in relation to the return to school for all pupils. We do know that **Year 12 pupils (who will be awarded qualifications this Summer) will return to full-time face-to-face teaching on Monday 22nd March 2021** with further information provided closer to this date. I still remain hopeful that our Year 8-11 pupils will be permitted to return immediately after the Easter holidays.

Year 10 Options

Reminder that Year 10 options sheets should be returned (via your child's Form Class Google Classroom) before 4.00pm on Monday 8th March.

Feedback on Parent/Guardian Remote Learning Survey

Thank you to all parents/guardians that completed our online survey. Overall, the results and comments were very positive about the experience of remote learning and the support offered by the school. I therefore want to acknowledge the excellent work completed by pupils, parents and staff during this difficult time.

As with any survey, it is important to analyse the responses and identify areas for development with these results highlighting 2 key matters as listed below:

1. **Devices** – I was surprised to see that 77% of parents/guardians surveyed stated that their child was using a mobile phone to access remote learning. I personally feel that using a mobile phone to access emails and messages is fine but that the small screen of this type of device does not make it suitable to actually complete work on before submitting it electronically. In my correspondence (dated 1st January 2021) I offered the opportunity to contact me if pupils did not have access to suitable devices. A number of families did opt to borrow school devices but unfortunately we now have none left. While I could contact the EA for further devices, it is unlikely that these would be available before all pupils return to school.

I therefore encourage pupils to complete their remote learning on a PC, laptop, tablet or ipad as these devices have a much larger screen than a mobile phone and are also more compatible with the range of school based software.



2. **Live Lessons** – Some parents/guardians provided comments which indicated that they would prefer to see pupils having more live lessons or interaction with teachers.

I met virtually with all teachers at the beginning of January to discuss the different teaching strategies that we could use to engage pupils during this period of remote learning. These included photocopied materials, electronic instructions with worksheets, pre-recorded videos, other video links (eg youtube), audio instructions and live lessons.



We also examined research completed by DENI (during lockdown 1) which indicated that no one size fits all and that a combination of the aforementioned strategies is recommended and this is what we have attempted to deliver to our pupils.

However, following the results of a recent teacher survey, I do accept that the percentage of live lessons delivered by our teachers to date has been lower than other teaching strategies used. When I explored the reasons for this with my teachers, I was presented with a list of frustrations which included poor South Armagh broadband, low pupil participation (eg only 2 out of 19 Year 10 pupils attended a Year 10 online Technology lesson yesterday afternoon), pupils not displaying their screens and pupils joining the lesson while based in an inappropriate location.

Despite these frustrations, our teachers will be moving forward by increasing the provision of live lessons over the coming weeks before we conduct a further review. However, for these lessons to be successful, it is important that parents/guardians discuss the following points with their child/children in order to contribute towards a successful lesson:

- Pupils must attend (as teachers will have prepared for the lesson).
- Pupils should adhere to the expected standards of behaviour that are identified within our Code of Conduct and Positive Behaviour Policy. Sanctions may be issued to those who fail to meet these standards.
- Pupils should display their screens at all times and remain muted unless otherwise instructed by the teacher (it is very difficult for a teacher to engage with pupils if they are continually speaking to blank screens).
- For child protection reasons, it is important that pupils attend live lessons in an appropriate location (a bedroom is not an appropriate location).

As previously stated, I will continue to monitor the effectiveness of this live interaction and act accordingly. I therefore trust that I have your support on this matter and I am happy to discuss it further with any parent/guardian that still has further concerns.

As always, please do not hesitate to contact me regarding any aspect of school life.

Yours faithfully

Neil Megaw

Principal