



Newtownhamilton High School

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Dear Parent/Guardian

You will be aware from media reports yesterday evening that the Northern Ireland Executive has agreed that schools will not return on Monday 22nd February as originally planned. **A provisional return date has now been set for Monday 8th March.** As a parent of 2 children, I fully understand how frustrating this news is as the current model of remote learning will never replace face-to-face teaching.

Since my last correspondence (dated 12th January), I have spoken with many parents, other local Principals and EA support staff while also continuing to engage with my own staff about their experiences of remote learning and the commitment of our pupils. As a result, please see below some important information which I want you to share with your child/children.

Daily Checking of Emails

All pupils are strongly encouraged to check their C2K email on a daily basis in order to see if there has been any communication from teachers and/or support staff. Personal email accounts should not be used to communicate with staff.

Form Class Google Classroom

All Form Teachers have recently created a 'Form Class Google Classroom'. This platform will be used to communicate important pastoral information, announcements and other key information (eg Year 10 options documents) with pupils. It is therefore important that all pupils accept the invite and join this Google Classroom.

Pupil Engagement & Attendance

While the overwhelming majority of pupils are engaging with their teachers, it is still very disappointing to note that a minority are giving minimal or no effort to remote learning.

Information shared with schools on 21st January, stated that recording of pupil attendance must be completed accurately and that a special code (for unauthorised absence) must be recorded against 'pupils who are learning at home but have not evidenced their learning as required by the school'.

Up until now, I have given non-engaging pupils the benefit of the doubt and have tried to work with families to resolve any issues/concerns. However, with effect from Monday 1st February, pupils that fail to engage with their teachers will be allocated the above unauthorised absence code and could be referred to the Education Welfare Officer if non-engagement persists.

GCSE RE (Short Course)

It is important to note that 11V and 12V pupils (except 12V Essential Skills Communication pupils) have been entered for the CCEA GCSE RE (Short Course) exam. These pupils must therefore engage with their teacher Miss Johnston, who will be required to provide a grade (for

12V pupils) in May 2021 based on her professional judgement and evidence of previous performance in this subject area.

Student Teachers

Every year, Newtownhamilton High provides an opportunity for student teachers to continue their professional development through a placement in school. Obviously this will prove much more challenging this year due to our current closure. However, I personally feel that it is important to still provide these students with the opportunity, albeit in a virtual (remote learning) format.

Therefore, please do not be concerned if the names Miss Laura Grant (Digital Technology & RE) and/or Mr Mark Dalzell (Maths & Science) appear in your child's Google Classroom. These student teachers have been vetted and will be working under the guidance of your child's normal class teacher.

SRC Remote Learning

Remote learning for 11V and 12V pupils who follow Occupational Studies at Southern Regional College (SRC) commenced yesterday morning. Our Vice Principal Mr Cousins informs me that, while there were some initial technical issues with logging in, pupil engagement was very encouraging at 83%. These sessions will continue every Thursday.

Year 12 GCSE Update

I am still awaiting confirmation from CCEA regarding the final process for their alternative awarding arrangements, but it has been confirmed that grades will again be based on teacher professional judgements. Further information will follow once it is published, however I reiterate the importance of Year 12 pupils continuing to engage with remote learning in all subject areas.

Finally, please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any queries.

Yours faithfully

Neil Megaw

Principal

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