



1<sup>st</sup> February 2021

Dear parents,

Following the most recent announcement from the Prime Minister, we now know that schools will be closed until 8<sup>th</sup> March at the earliest, and remote learning will continue until at least that date. As we remain in challenging times, and both the impact of the Corona virus and government policy remain difficult to predict, I thought it might be helpful to set out some firm decisions where possible, and to offer some additional guidance relating to teaching and learning.

### **1. February Half-Term**

St Bernard's will close for a normal half term break; the school will not be open to any students, including the children of key workers. Staff will not set further work for students during this week (15<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> February); nor should students expect work to be assessed during this week. The provision for the children of key workers will resume on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

### **2. Cancelled Events**

It is already clear that some events in the current calendar will not be possible this year:

- Year 10 and Year 12 work experience
- Sports Day
- Music for a Summer's Evening
- Year 3 Day

We expect some national guidance on the Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, and how to deal with Bronze, Silver and Gold Awards.

### **3. Plans for Year 11**

Year 11 have had a very difficult GCSE experience. As well as dealing with lockdowns and remote learning, they have had to endure a great deal of worry about how their grades will be assessed and then moderated nationally. Therefore, I believe that we must guarantee our Year 11 students a place in the Sixth Form this year. We do reserve the right to determine which courses they will be able to follow, but we will be more flexible than before. Unfortunately, this guarantee cannot be extended to our many external applicants. There will be a suitable course in our Sixth Form for every current Year 11 student at St Bernard's. The engagement of students with remote learning will be a key factor in the decisions made and the courses offered.

#### 4. Year 9 GCSE Options Choices

Students have now received all the information they need to make an informed decision about the Options subjects they will begin studying in September 2021. On our school website under Curriculum | GCSE Option Choices - 2021, there is a Presentation which talks you through the Options process and how to access the online form, and the Curriculum Information booklet which provides further guidance and specifications for each of the subjects. The deadline for the online Options form to be saved is **Friday 12th February**. *Please email Mrs Bennett ([hjb@stbernards.southend.sch.uk](mailto:hjb@stbernards.southend.sch.uk)) if you have any questions about the Options process or any issues accessing the form.*

Further support is available for students choosing their options from Mrs Davies, our Careers Coordinator. She is undertaking a programme of individual meetings, conducted remotely, for students who need additional help with their option choices and career aspirations. Please contact her at [hcd@stbernards.southend.sch.uk](mailto:hcd@stbernards.southend.sch.uk) if your daughter would benefit from such an interview.

#### 5. Remote Learning

Heads of Department and Heads of Year are monitoring the engagement of students in their learning, with teachers reporting on this aspect each week. Please contact your child's Head of Year if you have any concerns regarding too much or too little work being set, as the extent and depth of students' responses to the tasks set can make a difference to the length of time spent on any given task. We do expect students to be proactive in their studies, and to contact their teacher if they are struggling or have fallen behind with their work.

It is important that students in all year groups do not share their work online, especially once it has been assessed by their teacher. This is a good habit to develop, especially for Year 11 and 13 students, as the JCQ guidance for examination candidates advises:

*You need to know that the following would be malpractice:  
copying or allowing work to be copied – e.g. posting written work on social networking sites prior to an examination/assessment.*

Further information of this nature can be found in the different 'Information for Candidates' documents in the Exams section of our website. Students (and parents) should be familiar with their contents, as, although GCSE and A Level exams are not continuing in the same format, the regulations and guidance still applies.

**Pupils Submitting Work:** if your daughter/son does not submit work on time they will be reminded to complete it. However, work submitted late can often add to staff workload; to eliminate this, any work not submitted by a published deadline or any other work more than 48 hours late will not be assessed. This may affect future grades in the subject concerned. Staff will always do their best to mark work that is late when there is a genuine reason for this.

**Laptop availability:** the school receives regular requests from families who would like to borrow a laptop computer, and the demand has exceeded both the supply from central government and the school's resources. Therefore, we ask families to work out a way for siblings to share the devices available at home, and to avoid one child having sole use of a laptop at the expense of a sister or brother. This may require one child working earlier in the morning, or later in the afternoon or early evening. We would also ask any family that has a laptop that they no longer use to consider

donating it to a family in need; this can be done by dropping off the laptop at the school reception between 8.30am and 4pm on a school day. Such laptops need to be in working order and able to connect to the internet, please.

Please remember that work can also be accessed via smart phones and tablets. Whilst such smaller devices would not be useful tools for extended writing, they can be a further way to access lessons or see the work that has been set.

## **6. Parents Evenings, and Reports**

Parents' evenings in this academic year will be online for all year groups. We aim to produce the usual annual progress report for each year group according to the published calendar, and to send out reports by post. Please bear with us if this takes slightly longer than usual.

## **7. Testing for Covid19**

As outlined in my previous letter, a lack of space on our school site means that there will be no onsite testing and repeat testing of students and staff using Lateral Flow Devices. Therefore, when the school fully reopens, students will be asked to use the community testing facilities close to home, rather than being tested in school; moreover, following a policy change by the government, the contacts of students who test positive will be asked to self-isolate as before (there will not be a daily testing programme in school for these students).

In addition, we would ask that parents of children who currently attend school (mainly the children of key workers) take their children to the community testing sites on a regular basis, to protect other children and staff in school.

## **Concluding Remarks**

Please pray for all people affected by Covid19, and especially those who are anxious or unwell. Some parts of our society have faced the worst effects of the virus, and we hold these members of our community especially in our prayers; we also give thanks for the hope brought by medical advancements, as the implementation of the vaccination programme continues.

Like the government, we must meet a range of priorities and expectations: the safety and wellbeing of staff and students, academic progress, government directions. Please bear in mind that it only takes one government announcement to require all of these plans to be amended. Therefore, there could be further changes from what is outlined here.

We hope your families keep safe and well.

Yours faithfully



**Mr A Sharpe**  
**Headteacher**