



Update for Pupils and Parents Monday 20th April 2020

Good morning all

Welcome back to the third term of the school year – albeit in very unusual circumstances. I hope you are all managing to keep well and safe in the new normal in which we find ourselves at the moment.

Welcome back also to your online Learning. The Government has committed to keeping schools closed for the next three weeks – and to reviewing the situation again thereafter, so it is really important that you engage with Google Classrooms, and/or with Fronter, if that applies to your classes. Our Technician, Mr Cathcart and the senior team have been busy offering assistance to pupils who experienced difficulty accessing the online services. Alternatively – you can engage by collecting a work-pack from the school at an arranged time. Some packs were delivered prior to the holidays for very exceptional circumstances so please let us know if you are in difficulties.

I'm delighted to say that many pupils are working extremely hard – and for those who are not – I encourage you now to get involved. It is vital that you do so in advance of your end of year Assessment. This is a year in your schooling and we want to make sure it is a year that counts in terms of your learning and development, whatever form of Assessment is used.

The matter of Assessment is naturally a concern for pupils sitting final years of GCSE and A Level, and their parents. You have received documentation from the Examination Boards but you are understandably concerned about how Teacher Assessment will be managed in your own school, in a way that is equitable across all of the different subject areas and for the various Examination Boards – and also in a way that is equitable in relation to all other schools. I will set out the approach we will be taking and how it will be managed when all discussions have been finalised. In the meantime, I encourage you to keep on working on your courses, demonstrating your learning and improvement in the tasks your teachers set you, and providing continuing evidence which will help your teachers make accurate judgements about your learning. In particular, it will help your teachers when it comes to rank ordering students of a very similar standard, if they are able to see the results of your ongoing efforts, and also when it comes to writing references and recommendations for University and work placements.

Likewise, students in Years 11 & 13 should keep working. While in some Examination Boards you will have the choice to be assessed formally on your final year work only (ie when you move into Years 12 & 14, next school year), it is still vital that the learning and development continues



As you know, I am able to monitor the learning through an Overview of Pupil Engagement document which is updated daily. I can see that some of pupils have engaged in some subjects and not in others. It is tempting to neglect those areas which are most difficult for you – but I encourage you to take the plunge even if it is at the last moment. The strategies teachers have been using to help students with literacy or numeracy challenges have made a great difference to many young people. No work you do while at home will be wasted therefore, so please be encouraged to keep going!

If schools are permitted to re-open in May – even partly – I would want to give priority to groups of final year GCSE and A level pupils, working in groups of ten per classroom. Please note, there will be additional cleaning prior to any such opening. Social distancing will demand that we need to continue to use the online materials – but some of pupils may find it easier to ask questions face to face in school and to have the direct reassurance of a teacher.

I have contacted all the families who availed of Supervision in School for Children of Key Workers – and at present, school is not required by any of them until the very end of April. If this changes – or if you suddenly find you need the school to open, please let me know in advance. Members of Senior Staff will continue to be school at intervals in any case. Many of us have volunteered with the Department of Education to supervise in other schools where this is needed – but I stress that opening up our own school for our own pupils remains our priority.

Many of you have questions which you can ask via your Google Classrooms including the pastoral files. Please also continue to contact us via the School Email:

info@dunclugcollege'ballymena.ni.sch.uk

All such requests arrive with my secretary and are forwarded to me within the day, and also copied to me if someone else is able to deal with them.

Finally, I was able to send a clip of our Choir singing the lovely piece, 'You are Mine', adapted from Psalm 46, to the Prime Minister while he was ill in hospital with the virus, and I'm told that this message, along with other messages he received, brought him comfort and hope at a time when he was at his lowest in hospital. May we all know such comfort and reassurance in these days. Don't forget to clap for your NHS workers and all key workers on Thursday evenings - and to do your bit, if you can, to help someone who needs you, or someone in the front line, at this historic time.

Regards

Ruth Wilson