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Monday 27th April 2020

Dear Parents,

Welcome to the start of the summer term 2020 – the strangest start to a term that I can remember in 31 years of teaching! We kick-off a week later than planned and thank you to the many parents who took part in the survey about changing term dates – I am confident that the delay will prove to be a good decision both academically and pastorally for all our students. The issue of schools re-opening has been keenly debated by the media and it looks increasingly likely that we will re-open either just before or just after May half-term. Equally likely is that some sort of staggered re-opening may be introduced along with quite detailed social distancing measures. We are therefore busy contingency planning for such eventualities and we will keep you posted on developments every Friday along with our plans and schedules for each successive week. In the meantime, our intention is to carry on as normally as possible in terms of teaching and learning, offering pastoral support, writing reports for parents etc – and thank you so much for working with us so positively whilst we adjust to our virtual rhythms and routines.

As families, I very much hope that you have coped well with the enforced lock-down and that you have managed to stay fit and healthy throughout the Easter break. I am hugely indebted to the team at our Bexhill site for staying open to support the children of key workers and to all the members of staff who have worked hard to upskill and get ready for the new term. Virtual teaching and learning have dominated our educational thinking these past few weeks – and please bear with us as we continue to grapple with the challenges presented by the uncharted waters that we are entering. I have to applaud the positive and creative way in which staff have stepped up to support their students under these circumstances and I am equally very grateful to the parents who have had to re-juggle home life to create a home / school environment that is conducive to effective and enjoyable learning.

Over the holidays, I have been in touch with many students and parents asking for feedback about everything from Microsoft Teams to student wellbeing and to financial arrangements. The feedback on finances has been both heartening and challenging and I cannot thank enough the many parents who have contributed to our hardship fund. I fully understand too the serious pressures that some parents find themselves in and I wanted to assure you that the decision on fees was made after much research and advice received from national bodies as well as a comprehensive review of what we felt was affordable for us as a charity. For the term ahead, we are not charging any fees for nursery children (whilst it remains closed), we are forfeiting all boarding fee income (whilst the boarding houses are closed), we are offering either 20% or 10% discounts on fees and we are missing out on valuable and lucrative additional income streams like weddings and holiday courses. At the same time, like many businesses, we are looking at ways of accessing government support and, if successful, we hope to be able to increase the support available to our families. We have a governors meeting later this week and I will hopefully be able to update you on any financial developments soon after. So, thank you so much for your support during these difficult times and please do not hesitate to get in touch if you have any further questions or concerns regarding financial affairs.

The closing of schools and the national lockdown, though arduous in untold ways, has provided some unexpected opportunities and a number of positive outcomes. Across the country we are developing skills and interests we didn't know we had like hosting virtual drinks parties, star gazing, baking and yoga and we are tackling domestic tasks that have remained on the back-burner for months. I have made the most of getting fitter, I have learnt to cut my own hair (yikes!), I have tidied the shed and, for the first time ever, I have embraced the world of social media. Battle Abbey School has a presence on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and we have additionally launched BAS TV – for students and staff to share films and photos of lessons, events and challenges that have taken place. We would encourage you to follow us on one or all of these platforms where we will post assemblies, messages from staff, competitions and virtual activities and we will also download mini lectures given by teachers and 6th formers to engage you intellectually. Like much of our virtual offering, we are learning as we go but I am determined that we will continue to keep in touch with the wider Battle Abbey family to help in whatever way to lift spirits during these testing times. Do have a look at today's assembly which I filmed earlier and your children will be able to see a short interview we downloaded to BAS TV to introduce our new Maths teacher, Mr Jo Carthew.

To accompany this letter, you will also receive a note on FAQs which we hope you will find useful. This is an organic document which we will update as regularly as necessary in the coming weeks so please let us know of any questions to add which you think may be of help to the wider community. As you appreciate, we are living in deeply uncertain times and we are therefore having difficulty planning events and activities for the future. You will, nonetheless, receive a weekly email as usual with information for the following week so please keep an eye out for that in your inboxes. Though this is a tricky time for all of us, I have spoken before about how destabilizing this period is for our Year 11 and Year 13 students in particular. We have spent a good deal of time over the holidays looking at ways to support them and we are going to launch a comprehensive Preparation for Sixth Form course for the year 11s and then an equally extensive offering for the Year 13s to help prepare them for next steps after leaving school. For them, it is also an awkward time as they feel in some sort of educational limbo and we will be writing to parents of those year groups separately to reassure them going forwards.

There are a number of matters that I will draw to your attention in the coming weeks once we have received clearer guidance from official channels. In the meantime, please stay safe, keep in touch and best of luck as each of you also faces up to the difficulties presented by the crisis.

With very best wishes to you all.

David Clark