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Headmaster: David Clark, BA, M Phil (Cantab)

Letter to parents Friday 22nd May

Dear Parents,

Before reading this letter, could you please click on the link below to see a short video that I filmed in order to thank you for your support, patience and generosity this term. Your good-will and encouragement have played an important role in sustaining the staff through this period and I cannot thank you enough for that.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcniqVDJGQs&feature=youtu.be>

It seems strange to think that we break up for half-term today having not spent any time at school these past few weeks. We seem to be adjusting well to the 'new normal' and, best of all, the quality of the online learning seems to be of a really high standard. I have enjoyed seeing what has been achieved by many different departments and I thought I would share with you an extract from a piece of creative writing by one of our year 10 students:

'I can't help but envy the freedom and ignorant bliss that these insects have of the situation our world is facing. Scratching and clucking sounds of chickens minding their own business arose as the dogs barked. Happy sounds of laughter and fun from children playing in the garden next door lingered in the air. It made me realise that even when our world goes through tough patches, there is still happiness in this world. It is all around me as I sit on the old battered wooden bench, which has seen many seasons come and go in this garden, witnessed life burst awake in the spring and hibernate in the Autumn. I try and draw a parallel to our life now, I guess I have been walking around in a sort of stunned daze, doing things on autopilot, but now I am filled with hope that as the seasons will continue, the world will heal and life always goes on, no matter what.'

Our year 11 and 13 programmes are now up and running and I have had much lovely feedback from a range of participants and parents. I have particularly enjoyed teaching my Year 13 class – it is proving to be a pertinent time to be exploring the current complexities of Geo Politics. A beneficial consequence of the crisis has been that new starters into our 6th form this September have been able to join in with our Pre A Level courses and this early familiarity with the subject matter will serve those students well in the coming months. It has also given them the chance to explore certain topics in depth and I was struck by the higher-level thinking, for example, of the Philosophy students who were discussing the extent to which AI will be a threat to humanity.

Now that those in exam classes have been catered for, we have turned our attention to students in Key Stage 3 and in years 10 and 12 and our latest plans are outlined below.

Year 9 arrangements

After the half term break, students in Year 9 may opt to stop attending lessons that they are not continuing with at GCSE. At Battle Abbey we believe firmly that students should have a broad and balanced education, so if your child is coping well with online lessons, they are more than welcome to continue with all their lessons and to complete any tasks in assessment week.

Assessment Week

Usually, we have an exam week during the final half term of the year. To ensure fairness for students and to ensure they get the chance to demonstrate what they have learnt throughout the year we intend to run a revised assessment week. We are currently designing assessments that will work for students while they are working remotely. Students will be off timetable for the week to complete these assessments and more details will follow after half term from Mr. Austen-White.

KS3 lessons

Over the past week we have been carrying out some parent voice interviews in order to gather additional feedback. One of our findings is that parents really value the structure of their children following the school timetable but they do worry that it can become quite pressured without the natural breaks that would happen in the school day - for example, travelling between lessons. Therefore, in addition to a short break in the middle of a double lesson, staff have been asked to end their lesson 5 minutes early and to start their lessons 5 minutes late. This will give students rest breaks and will allow them a bit more time to get organised for the next lesson.

These measures will help many of our students to better navigate the challenges of remote learning but some students are likely to find the current situation especially difficult. To support them, we are pleased to let you know that Karen Persson Davis (who usually works at school providing counselling sessions) is able to offer (as a private arrangement) weekly confidential sessions to help students through this challenging time, responding to their personal, social and emotional concerns. If you feel your child would benefit from some sessions with Karen, please contact Mrs Buckland who can put you in contact with Karen. Fees range from £25 for a 30 minute session to £50 for a 50 minute session.

The other priority we have been dealing with has been to plan for the reopening of our Bexhill site on the 1st June and I am hugely grateful to the team there for all their hard work in preparing the additional safety elements to the school day. We are still, however, awaiting guidance on government intentions for years 10 and 12 and we very much hope that those year groups will be able to spend some time with us this term. Those studying practical subjects like art, for example, would really benefit from face to face time with their teachers and we are hopeful that a plan will be put in place soon to accommodate those students. Equally, we await instructions on the re-opening of boarding houses and, rest assured that we will update boarding parents as soon as we know more.

Our calendar for the summer term is normally full of wonderful activities – once exams are over. In a typical year, we would be busy getting ready for the Big Picnic, the Year 11 Prom, the summer ball, the junior production, the summer concert, Sports Day and, of course, Speech day on the final day of term. Naturally, many of these events cannot happen but we are looking to either re-schedule them to later in the year or to provide a virtual alternative. Again, more details about our thinking will come out after the half-term break.

In the meantime, enjoy our postings on social media, stay safe and have a lovely week of quality time with the family.

Best wishes to you all.

David Clark