

Parentmail message from Mrs Collins

13/05/2020

Dear parents and carers,

Although it is not long since I last wrote to you, the amount of change and turbulence associated with the current crisis means that we have been inundated with huge amounts of information and continuous policy development and decision making at a national level within that time. As I drove to the college this morning, there seemed to be far more vehicles on the roads, construction workers appearing on previously empty sites and even more people out exercising than normal – delighted, no doubt, to have the opportunity to be out more than once a day.

Sourcing help and support during the crisis

I hope that you are managing as best as you can in your varied circumstances. We have been saddened to hear that several of our families have suffered from the death of elderly relatives, or from periods of illness, over the last several weeks. **Please can I ask, if one of these scenarios applies to you and you have not yet already notified your child's tutor, that you do so as soon as possible, also copying in Mrs Cornelius ccornelius@thomasestley.org.uk**, both so that we can try to support your child in managing their remote workload through challenges associated with illness or bereavement, and also because we are working hard with other schools and the local authority to plan support and signposting to families and children in cases of bereavement, trauma and challenges to mental health. There is also some really useful support for families in terms of mental health and isolation at <https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/coronavirus-covid-19-staying-at-home-tips/> and some useful help and support strategies for children and families suffering from bereavement at <https://www.cruse.org.uk/>

I am also aware that many of you will be furloughed or have sadly lost jobs and sources of income and that this brings its own challenges. **If you feel that you may have become eligible for free school meals for your child**, we are able to source food vouchers which we can send to you (or meals when they are attending school) if and when free school meal eligibility is confirmed by the local authority – please go to <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/social-care-and-supporting-families/free-school-meals> for more information if you think that you may be eligible.

If you are self-isolating or shielding during the crisis and **you need some help to access food or medicines for yourself and your family**, you can also visit <https://www.broughton-astley.gov.uk/news/2020/03/broughton-astley-volunteer-group> (Broughton Astley), <https://www.facebook.com/groups/569175410618065/?ref=share> (Cosby) <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/popular-now/directories/information-and-support-directory/whetstone-good-neighbour-scheme> (Whetstone) <https://www.sapcote-parish-council.org.uk/news/2020/03/covid-19-coronavirus-sapcote-helpers> (Sapcote), as well as other local schemes.

Students learning at home

Thank you for working so hard to facilitate your child's home learning; we know that this can be a real challenge and we appreciate all that you and your child have done to ensure that this takes place as effectively as possible. We have been delighted to be able to share some work which

recently made us smile both in recent teaching and learning newsletters from subject departments and on an ongoing basis on our college Facebook page. At the moment, we have transferred our **Year 11 remote work to become wholly post 16 bridging work into Y12 and FE/apprenticeships**, which will best prepare our students for their projected future courses, which work can still be found on their personalised Show My Homework pages for Year 11 students to access. **For students in Years 7-9**, we know that they are likely to be continuing to work solely remotely at home until the end of the academic year, and it is vital that they are able to do this within a structured day at home which balances work time, free time and focussed time for their wellbeing. Recent feedback has been that we could improve our spread of work allocated across the week to further support our students, and we are working on this currently to better ensure a well spread working timetable for students. Our teachers are working really hard to set appropriate work and to respond where needed, and are beginning to try out more engaging teaching methods including some voiced over powerpoints, etc, in line with best practice. We are looking to further extend these strategies where we can. **For students in Year 10**, it is likely (although not yet assured – the government is issuing daily advice around this to schools and the public and will continue to do so, depending on the spread of the virus and other logistics) that they are able to attend onsite at some time between the start of June and the end of term. With this in mind and the uncertainty around it, we are working simultaneously both on assuring good home learning and on developing possible models for facilitating some learning and/or mentoring and advice for Year 10 onsite should we be able to do so before the summer break.

What happens after June 1st?

We have been told that, on Friday May 29, the government will take a decision as to whether any children other than the small number of key children already allowed to attend schools will be able to attend their school over the last half term of the academic year. **If they are allowed to do so by the government, this will apply only to children in early years education, Year One, Year Six and Year Ten, and not to other yeargroups**, although risk assessments in individual schools and their physical capacity to support social distancing to ensure the safety of the children may affect this. Full current information can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>, although we are receiving ongoing changes to this guidance on a daily basis so unfortunately I cannot guarantee that it won't change before children potentially return. In terms of Year Ten, current guidance is that there should be some opportunity to attend school at some point before the summer to have face to face contact with at least some teachers, and we are currently looking at how we can best manage this to ensure the safety of our young people and staff within the social distancing, health and hygiene constraints which will need to be imposed on site. We have been advised that this will definitely not be full time education for all students in Year Ten and that it will not be for the full six weeks. As we continue to receive government advice, I will keep you updated. Safeguarding our students and community is of the highest priority to us, although we also take academic progress very seriously, and we are working hard with other schools, trusts, the local authority and other agencies and partners, to achieve the best possible outcomes in this challenging situation.

Remembering: Memorial Peace Garden and Sunflowers

As previously communicated to you, we had begun to make plans to remember Ellie and Elliott, two of our young people who sadly passed away earlier this year. We had held a memorial service for Ellie, planted a tree outside reception and had begun plans to fundraise for a memorial garden. Elliott's friends had attended his funeral and his mum had sent some sunflower seeds into college so that we could plant them and remember him, although we had to close the school before we could hold our memorial service. We have not forgotten Ellie or Elliott and we still have plans to fundraise

for a Memorial Peace garden onsite, in their memory, and also as a place where those who have sadly lost relatives or friends during this crisis can go to remember them, next academic year and beyond. We have shared the sunflower seeds out to staff and keyworker children onsite during the closure, and we are planting them now to remember Elliott when they flower later in the summer. If you have access to sunflower seeds and would like to plant them, we will ask you later to send in pictures so that we can create a sunflower collage in memory of Elliott. We will be in touch later with an appeal for funds for the Memorial Peace garden, which some of our children had written just before schools closed. Although we have committed to pay for fencing and some of the landscaping, we do not have funds for all the plants and benches, etc, which will make it a special place to be. I hope that you will be able to support us so that we can support our children in remembering their friends and family in a time of great personal and community loss.

Warmest wishes,

Mandi Collins

Principal