

22nd April 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian

Re: Weekly update

Welcome to the 3rd week of TheHolt@home and the 5th week of lockdown.

I hope Easter felt like a break for you and your families and that you were able to enjoy the warm weather and fresh air. I am sad to share that both staff and students have lost loved ones to the coronavirus and our thoughts are with them at this difficult time.

We are very aware that it is a worrying time for families concerned about their income, future job security as well as family members and on top of this all being cooped up together at home. I think most of us long to have our routines back and to socialise...and teenagers must be feeling this even more. If things are hard at home for your son/daughter, please do let us know by emailing homestudy@holt.wokingham.sch.uk. There are some positives - family mealtimes, having time to cook food, daily exercise and for most of us, generally living life at slower pace, with more time for reflection and there is certainly no sense of FOMO...fear of missing out...we are all in the same situation.

It has been a smooth start to the week, Year 7, 8, 9 and 12 are being set lessons in line with the content they need to cover at this time of year and Year 10 are preparing for their PPEs. These exams start on Monday and go on for two weeks. Good luck to Year 10!

We have no idea when the lockdown will be relaxed and when schools will back in school. Moreover, businesses are in a very difficult situation and again many have huge worries about reviving their organisations after lockdown so although disappointing, we are cancelling work experience this year for Year 10, which was going to be in mid-June and Year 12 early on in July.

A few parents have asked about live streaming of video lessons on TEAMS or Zoom. It is more complicated than it first seems. Firstly, we cannot use Zoom as it is not secure, poses a safeguarding risk and all schools were advised not to use it. Teams is a much better platform, however there are other issues to consider. More safeguarding advice came out about live online video lessons in the first week of school closures...warning of the problems of having live pictures of students on screen...where they are likely to be in bedrooms, in their pyjamas etc...another safeguarding risk. For the vast majority of cases we know that most parents would ensure their child behaved appropriately, however, we have to be so careful and we need to keep staff and students safe and not create potentially tricky situations. In addition, we have many teachers who have to supervise their young children at home during the day and end up planning their lessons early in the morning or late in the evening – they would not be able to do live streaming lessons. We also have teachers who have a room in a house share and this makes it difficult to livestream. Moreover, students are often sharing a laptop with multiple users in the house - so to 'turn up' to a live stream lesson can be problematic. Consequently, as with most other schools in Wokingham we are not allowing the live streaming of video lessons.

We do understand the need for variety in setting work online. Several colleagues have successfully used the smart recorder over PowerPoints or have used it to introduce a topic or explain a concept. We are also experimenting with live audio only lessons on TEAMS with a small group of sixth formers and if it is worthwhile, we will share with colleagues. The last thing we want is for online learning to be a burden on top of everything else that is going on...we are adapting to the situation on a daily basis refining how we do things and will continue to do so. I hope I have reassured you that we are striving to make the online learning as good an experience as possible for students and staff – given the constraints – but it takes time.

Staff miss their daily chats with students in class and at break and lunchtime, often prompted by 'noticing' how students present themselves (cheery, miserable, excited, pensive, just not their usual self and so on). Our staff are trying hard to engage with students as their class teachers, tutors or Heads of Year through email or TEAMS chat. Please encourage your son/daughter to respond to their teacher's nudges to engage in conversation. Teachers let us know if they are concerned about a student not engaging and if after a few emails to the student and/or parents we fail to hear anything a member of SLT calls home to check how things are.

Mrs Whitehouse received some good news on the biology challenge results for Year 9 and 10. Over 23,600 students completed this worldwide from 327 different schools, so the 13 girls who gained gold, the 18 students who achieved silver and the 16 who collected a bronze certificate did exceptionally well. Congratulations to all and thank you to Mrs Whitehouse for organising the challenge.

Finally, we were sad to say goodbye to Mrs Kemp, Head of Sixth Form (Teaching and Learning) and geography teacher at the end of last term. She has moved on from The Holt to take up a position as Assistant Headteacher at Oakbank. Congratulations to Mrs Kemp! Please can any correspondence regarding sixth form matters be sent to the KS5team@holt.wokingham.sch.uk. Mrs Bellis will be the sole Head of Sixth Form this term.

We welcome Mrs Amina Mohain, teacher of POR, Mrs Deborah Morgan, teacher of biology and Miss Gemma Collins, Food and nutrition technician who have all just joined The Holt.

Mrs Pearce and I hope you have a good week and if you have any queries please do get in touch through homestudy@holt.wokingham.sch.uk.

Best wishes



Anne Kennedy
Co-Headteacher