FAQs for Parents

Will the school be providing "live" online lessons in the future?

We are aware that some schools, especially private schools, are providing some live lessons,where pupils are asked to "attend" at a specific time via an online platform and the teacher leads a lesson. This approach may have some benefits and we are continuing to look at its potential future use. As we have done throughout this crisis, we want to be open with you and share what we are taking into consideration in our decision making.

Firstly, we are exploring the evidence base for how effective "live" online teaching is compared to our current hybrid model of setting work pupils can do at a time of their choosing with some online support and increased use of pre-recorded video explanations. As we are in a unique and unforeseen situation, there is limited evidence available. However the Education Endowment Foundation, one of the leading organisations on research and evidence in education, has released a rapid evidence assessment for distance learning to support schools in developing their strategies. Their summary of evidence states: "There was no clear difference between teaching in real time and alternatives". As further evidence emerges of the effectiveness or otherwise of "real time" online teaching, we will use that evidence in our planning.

Secondly, we are considering the issue of teacher expertise. Teachers in England have been trained to deliver lessons in person and have not been trained to teach live online. We are offering training to staff during lockdown to help them continue to offer the best possible learning to pupils who are working at home. You will see an increase in the use of pre-recorded video material online and we are investigating how to train staff further in a range of approaches.

Thirdly, whatever approaches schools take it is essential that all students have equal access to learning. There are a number of barriers that any school must overcome to enable effective "live" teaching to take place for all students. At present, around 10 % of families do not have access to a laptop or similar device and/or do not have access to reliable broadband. At present we are producing 400 sets of printed work packs for students without IT infrastructure. In addition to this, a school must be able to ensure that a device is not required by someone else in the household at the time of a live lesson and therefore that each sibling in a house had access to their own device and sufficient data through their broadband connection. At present we estimate that up to 40% of households do not have enough devices.

The final area schools must consider is whether all students could "attend" a lesson at a specific time and in an appropriate workspace. There are several issues to consider here, including health of members of the household, caring responsibilities that some of our young people have and the additional stress for parents and carers of ensuring everyone in that house is working on exactly the right thing at the right time, as well as how to catch a pupil up who has had to miss a "live lesson".

Our priority is for all pupils to have access to the best learning that can be provided in the context of these extremely challenging times for families. At present, there is little evidence of the benefits of "live" teaching over our hybrid model and there are many barriers we are continuing to work to overcome. We are trialling some "live" teaching in small groups where we know all students have access to the necessary infrastructure and will analyse the effectiveness of this approach. Staff are working really hard to develop high quality teaching resources that pupils can access in a flexible way at different times and on different days and leaders are reviewing what we are offering every day.

Should my child be following their timetable at school?

We strongly advise that students do not approach their online learning by following their school timetable. It is important to remember that as well as completing schoolwork other activities with the family are just as important. We have provided a suggested timetables for KS3 and KS4 students. These can be found in our 'Managing Workload' Guides, links to these are on the 'letters, information and documents' section of our website. Please see our online guidance for learning if you are struggling to know how to help your child get into a routine. If you require further support please get in touch with our pastoral team who will be able to offer more guidance.

Is the work they are completing new content, and will it be marked?

Following the Easter holidays, all subjects have started to introduce new curriculum content for all year groups. Prior to this, all work was consolidation of prior learning.

Year 10 and 12 began new content on 20 April 2020 and KS3 started new content on 4 May 2020.

We will continue to set work in two-week blocks for all subjects and on the subject instructions it should clearly say which piece of work should be submitted for feedback and how. Each department may request for work to be submitted in a different way, so it is important that students check these instructions. Where students are working from a work pack at home, they should take a photo and send it in to the subject specific emails where they can.

Teachers will use a variety of ways to feedback to students on their work. These include feedback sheets emailed to students; feedback sheets uploaded to the online platform; a short video recording of a teacher talking through common misconceptions. Teachers will mark work once all the work has been submitted and students will receive feedback within the fortnightly block following the submission date.

My child cannot access the online platform; how do they complete the work to the same level as their peers?

We are acutely aware that not all students have the same access to technology and the internet. We have ensured that every subject has both an online and offline version of the work that is set. If you require a paper copy of the work because you have accessibility issues, please contact the school and we will arrange for a set to be printed for you. We can then post this to you or it can be collected safely from school.

How do I keep my child motivated to complete the work?

Firstly, remember that these are unprecedented times and you are not there to be their teacher. Some children will self-motivate, and others will struggle to see the benefit of working online. Offering rewards and praise will be motivational for them and as much as you can try to involve yourself in what they are doing and take an interest. Get them to show you their finished piece or offer to help proof read longer written work. Do not feel that you are alone in this and if there are any concerns about particular subjects or their attitude to their learning then please get in touch with us and we can offer a range of support to help you and your child.

How do I get in touch with their teacher?

Each subject has a designated email address and these can be found in the support folder on the online platform. These email addresses ensure all students can access a subject specialist who may not necessarily be their classroom teacher, but still able to provide support and guidance. Please remember that like you many of our teachers are parents who are juggling life at home with their own children or dependents and it is not always possible for them to be available. The support emails are the fastest way to ensure that your query can be answered.

Why are the subjects all set out differently it would be easier if they all looked the same?

Whilst it would be easier to have a one size fits all approach to the online platform please remember that all subjects are unique and the way that students need to access knowledge in each subject will vary greatly. We have given our teachers complete autonomy to design their subjects in the most appropriate way to support distanced learning for your child. This may require them to navigate to other sites to access information. These will be familiar to your child and although they may need support in remembering passwords, they will have used these in their normal lessons and are there to provide engagement and familiarity.

The work is not suitable for all learning styles and my child is finding it too hard/easy

The new content that will be available for your child will mean that they are likely to need longer to work through it. Where possible, we are looking to improve our interaction by providing PowerPoints with teachers talking through the lesson to help guide students. It is our strong belief that all students have access to the same work regardless of ability. Subjects are working hard to ensure that this is differentiated as much as possible to support all needs. If there is a particular need for your child that you feel has not been met, then please do not hesitate to get in touch through our support emails and we will endeavour to support as best we can at home.