

## Update

We hope that all families have stayed well and safe over the Easter period and that you have been able to try out something different over the past two weeks, by learning new skills with your child (ren). It most certainly has not been a typical two week holiday for our staff and we realise that likewise, for our students and families!

Our staff have been doing shift work at St David's School, Colwinston looking after the children of key-workers, alongside primary colleagues;volunteering at Hensol Distillery, with some of our senior students, to make hand gel for the the NHS, police and care homes; making gowns for hospital staff as well as our senior staff conducting strategic planning for very different and uncharted territory. I am hugely proud of our staff for their altruistic endeavours and their willingness to offer to do anything over and above, and outside of, their usual roles!

I have been privileged also to receive examples of great work completed by students. This has included innovative animations, stunning artwork, photos of meals that have been created at home by students and photographs taken over the last few weeks. I am in no doubt that different students are learning in very different ways and hope that the extended day without the rigid structure of a typical school day, is providing opportunities for practical and worthwhile projects that would otherwise not be possible to fit in.

## School Opening

There has been a constant flurry of new information daily from the Welsh and UK Governments. This has often led to the media misrepresenting this information, consequently leading to rumours and in some cases, fake news. An example of which appeared on the front page of a newspaper on Sunday alleging that schools will open within 3 weeks. Inevitably, this has led to an increased sense of collected concern of undue haste, when in fact, this will not be the case at all. Cowbridge Comprehensive School will open when it is safe to do so and we will plan strategically to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of our staff, pupils and the wider community. Once we receive relevant information from Welsh Government, we will assess this locally, within our context and with full consultation of our staff and appropriate notice to parents and pupils to ensure the confidence of all concerned.

Inevitably, we are all keen to resume life as we knew it, however, to apply the same logical thinking to many of the new situations we currently find ourselves in, will be illogical. New thinking and planning will and must be agile and intuitive, like it has never been before and in very uncharted territory. To this end I wish to reassure all, that the Senior Leadership Team is meeting regularly and with a significant agenda for the immediate and medium term future. This will also address how we bridge the gap in formal learning for those pupils who may need to catch up in different ways. **We have invested heavily in our teacher training over the long term and we have every confidence that our fantastic teachers will be confident, agile, forward thinking and will be able to create the best environment for students to learn quickly when they return to us. We have all probably heard of *HIT*, *high intensity training*; I am in no doubt that our skilled teachers will secure '*high intensity teaching*' when we return to life with a difference!**

## Distance learning

Again, there has been a significant amount of coverage in the media regarding 'online' learning and in some cases scaremongering around missing education. I respectfully remind all parents that we have actually lost 2 weeks of formal school term time, so far. The past 2 weeks would have ordinarily been the Easter holidays and no formal school-based learning would have taken place.

In fact, it is clear from the feedback from staff, parents and pupils that a considerable amount of '*distant*' learning is taking place in different ways and it is important, as I have stated in earlier communication, that learning is not purely seen as 'online'. Online learning can be very demotivational for some and different people learn in different ways. The closure period of schools presents an ideal opportunity for different students to be motivated to do different things compared with the highly structured school day.

There are many different definitions of learning, however, learning is a process that leads to change, which occurs as a result of experience and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning. These changes could include the acquisition of knowledge, new attitudes or behaviours, habits and ways of thinking. We know that learning should not be something done to students, but rather **something students themselves do**. It is the direct result of how students respond and interpret their experiences.

Our staff will continue to set work, however, they will also expect for students and their parents to reinforce the values and methods of what has already been outlined on the school's website from the outset. This encourages **reading, researching and creating a project around individual interests**. There is some interesting information for you to consider by exploring the links on this page. I cannot emphasise the importance of practical and creative ways of learning. Learning different skills in this way will keep the brain active and more prepared for when formal learning can take place at school again. Parents should not overly worry about their child(ren) missing out, as long as you are encouraging your child to do different things practically and read, read and read more again!

We will be discussing and prioritising education and learning for current Y10 and Y12 pupils in the next 2 weeks, regardless of when the school reopens and considering how students can access more formal learning. This may include prioritising a laptop loan scheme on a weekly basis for those students in Y10 and Y12 where access to a computer is proving difficult. Further details will follow.

### **Examinations: Teacher Assessments and Professional Judgements**

**Our teachers are busy following a rigorous and robust internal process for awarding grades for all students who ordinarily would have formal GCSE and A Level examinations in line with Welsh Government and Qualifications Wales requirements. This involves the following:**

*Teacher assessed grades will be based on what teachers would expect a learner to achieve at the end of the course. They need to represent a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most likely grade that might be achieved in normal circumstances. This is a professional judgement based on the combined assessment information held for that learner and will be a holistic judgement rather than focusing on a single source of evidence like mock examinations.*

**Once again, I respectfully remind parents that your views and judgments cannot and will not be considered as part of this process and any communication to staff in relation to trying to influence your child's grades, will not elicit a response.** The examination boards will retain the right to scale grades if they feel a school has been too generous and therefore, the final outcomes may change according to the boundaries set by the examination boards. **No student or parents will be able to have any information regarding the grades awarded by teachers until the formal results day in August. This is consistent with all students across Wales.**

The outcomes of students' performance will be made available on the planned days in August (**August 13th for A Level results and August 20th for GCSE results**) and this will likely be in electronic and/or via postal methods. It is unlikely that the school will be open to students as per previous years, however, we will be planning methods for students to seek advice from us and will communicate this with you in the coming weeks and how this can be accessed.

### **School Timetable and Calendar for 2020/21**

Senior staff are busy planning the timetable for September and there are certain difficulties which will be communicated with students such as oversubscription criteria for certain Sixth Form subjects and for other subjects which are undersubscribed and/or have clashes and will not be viable to run. These details will follow separately to groups of students.

**One decision that has been made is that no educational visits abroad will take place for the academic year 2020/21.**

We will not have sufficient time to plan for them and it is highly unlikely that there will be insurance cover available for any trips abroad as many companies have withdrawn insurance for trips of this nature. It is therefore financially and practically not viable to consider trips abroad for the foreseeable future. It is also understandable that the confidence levels of parents, pupils and staff in undertaking such planning will be affected. We are aware also that economically, some families may be at a disadvantage and we do not wish to place additional burden on families, financially or otherwise.

Any trip within the UK that is planned will be fully aligned to the taught curriculum. It is inappropriate at this stage to determine that no trips will take place, however, the activities which will take place, even in this country, will be scaled back to maximise teaching time, especially for Y10 into Y11 and Y12 and Y13. It is likely that as the academic year passes, we will play a key role in allowing some visits to build confidence levels of pupils and parents, over time, and stimulate enrichment.

### **Wellbeing of Students**

I wish to reassure all parents that the wellbeing of your children is highly important to us and we are aware that there are very different circumstances applying to different students within different families and households, for different reasons.

Staff have already contacted many students and it is our intention to ensure that all students are contacted by a familiar staff member over the coming weeks. Any student or parent can

contact us via [wellbeing@cowbridgecs.co.uk](mailto:wellbeing@cowbridgecs.co.uk). This email account is monitored daily by senior staff and we will respond accordingly and as soon as possible to any query sent to us.

I am confident that although there will be a new normal, we will create an even better and stronger, cohesive community. Our planning is already firmly focused around equity, equality and excellence for all and we look forward with trepidation but also great optimism! We wish you all the very best in these strange times and hope that you take care, stay safe and are able to be kind, considerate and compassionate to others, especially when they are encountering difficult circumstances.

*Mrs Thomas*  
*Headteacher*