

John Masefield High School and Sixth Form Centre

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5 January 2021

Dear students, parents, and carers

Following the announcement of a national lockdown and the closure of schools until February half term for most pupils last night I write to update you on the arrangements we are making at JMHS for online working for the vast majority of students and skeleton school for vulnerable children and for children where both parents are key workers.

Online working

It is our intention for all students to access live teaching via Microsoft Teams. Unfortunately, this morning Microsoft Teams was overloaded across the country with students from JMHS and across many other schools unable to hear the teacher, losing the connection intermittently or unable to view the presentation the teacher was showing on the screen. We therefore had to ask teachers to load today's work onto epraise. This last minute change has been hugely frustrating for our teachers as well as students and parents.

We believe that Microsoft will be working incredibly hard and buying up gazillions of gigabytes of server space to get Teams working better tomorrow. We will therefore be asking our teachers to try and deliver lessons via Teams again tomorrow, but also to upload work onto e-praise as a back up

Just a reminder that the lesson times are:

Lesson One: 08:55-09:55

Lesson Two: 10:00-10:55

Lesson Three: 11:15-12:15

Lesson Four: 13:15-14:15

Lesson Five: 14:15-15:15

If all goes well teachers will deliver live lessons using Microsoft Teams from their usual classrooms from tomorrow onwards. These lessons will not be as effective as face to face teaching, but were judged to be more helpful by a clear majority of parents in the Summer Term than just setting online work. For most lessons the teacher will deliver a twenty-minute presentation or interactive session and then set a task for students to complete via epraise for the remainder of the lesson. In most cases the teacher will remain online to answer any questions students have whilst working on the task. Mr Hammond, our Assistant Headteacher, has prepared a guide for students and parents on using Microsoft Teams which is attached to this message. Although we may not be able to resolve technical issues with your computer equipment at home, our IT Support team might be able to assist you. If you have any general questions about online teaching, please contact Mr Hammond (Assistant Headteacher). The email addresses, respectively, are itsupport@jmhs.hereford.sch.uk and peter.hammond@jmhs.hereford.sch.uk. There is also guidance under the Student heading on the school website.

Teachers will be prioritising lessons for Year 11 and Year 13 as outlined by the government but will endeavour to deliver suitable lessons for all year groups.

If Teams does not work tomorrow, we will set work via epraise instead and start to investigate alternatives for delivering live lessons in a reliable way.

Skeleton School

Today 20 vulnerable children and children of key workers attended Skeleton School. They completed the same lessons via epraise and Teams as other children did at home whilst being supervised by teaching assistants with regular visits from Year Leaders. If you need to book a place for a vulnerable child or a child of key workers, please email Mr Collard at andy.collard@jmhs.hereford.sch.uk and try to give us several days' notice. If you need to cancel a Skeleton School booking, please could you email Mr Collard with as much notice as possible.

Examinations for Year 11 and Year 13

The government have announced that GCSE and A-Level examinations this year have been cancelled. They have said that over the next few days OFQUAL, the exams regulator, will be announcing how grades will be awarded. We understand that the uncertainty caused by this announcement will be difficult for Year 11 and Year 13 students and parents. We would encourage any students or parents wishing to talk to someone about this to contact their form tutor or year leader. Whatever system OFQUAL choose to use to award grades to Year 11 and Year 13 students, it is essential that students in these year groups work as hard as they can at home, completing all tasks set and contact their subject teacher and ask for help if they are struggling with the work.

As yet, the government, OFQUAL and examination boards have not made any decision about vocational qualifications. Whilst we do not know whether the vocational exams planned for next week will take place we have to currently assume that they will so students should continue to prepare for these examinations. This is an extremely difficult situation for the students involved and we are urgently seeking clarification.

The mock exams scheduled for Year 11 (Monday 25 January to Friday 5 February 2021) and Year 13 (Monday 22 February – Wednesday 3 March 2021) will be cancelled and rearranged so that we will not make students do mock exams immediately after or shortly after they return to school. We will give them as much time as possible for students to prepare thoroughly and demonstrate their ability and knowledge.

Asymptomatic Testing Programme

We have commenced work on putting into place our COVID testing programme with staff planning how this will work and undertaking online training. We intend to commence testing our staff by the end of this week and then offer weekly lateral flow tests to all staff and to students attending Skeleton School within the next fortnight if all goes well. If our trial of the rapid testing programme goes well it could be a useful way of keeping students and staff safe when all students return to school.

However, I would stress the following:

1. The testing is voluntary and would only take place with parental permission and the consent of the student.
2. We will make sure we trial this thoroughly to iron out any difficulties before testing of students commences.

Student and parent guide to working from home

Over the next week we intend to produce and publish a guide to effective learning from home. The guide will include details of how to access lessons, tips for effectively learning from home, details about how we will give feedback to students and email addresses for teachers and staff so that students and parents can contact us to ask for advice and support.

Department of Education funded laptops

At the moment, and despite repeated attempts, we have not been able to order our allocation of computers from the Department of Education. The computers are primarily intended to be allocated to students who are designated as disadvantaged, and so we prioritise these students. However, if we can secure our allocation of computers, we will try to make them available to lend to other students.

Events and key dates for the Spring Term

- Monday 4 January 2021: INSET day – no school for students
- Tuesday 5 January 2021: Term starts with online teaching for all year groups
- Thursday 14 January 2021: Year 7 Parents' Evening – Virtual
- Thursday 21 January 2021: Year 8 Choices Evening – Virtual
- Thursday 28 January 2021: Year 12 & Year 13 Parents' Evening – Virtual
- Monday 1 February 2021: Staff Training Afternoon – students depart at 12.10/12.25pm
- Thursday 11 February 2021: Year 8 Parents' Evening - Virtual
- Monday 15 February 2021 – Friday 19 February 2021: Half Term
- Thursday 25 February 2021: Year 10 Parents' Evening - Virtual
- Thursday 4 March 2021: Year 9 Parent' Evening – Virtual
- Tuesday 9 March 2020: Staff Training Afternoon – students depart at 12.10/12.25pm
- Thursday 11 March 2020: Year 11 Parents' Evening – Virtual
- Thursday 1 April 2020: Term ends at 3.15pm

...And finally

I would like to wish every student and every family all the very best in these difficult times and encourage you to contact us if we can help in any way.

With my very best wishes



Andrew Evans
Headteacher