



11 February 2021

Dear students, parents, and carers

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Congratulations for your hard work this half term

It has been an extremely challenging half term for teachers, students and parents as online learning at home is considerably more difficult than learning in the classroom. I have been delighted with how staff and students have responded to this challenge by using their initiative and being resilient and not giving up when beset by problems. The quality of work submitted by students has been of a high standard, they have worked hard in lessons and appreciated the help and support teachers are giving. I would also like to say how much I appreciate the excellent support and help parents have given their children at this difficult time.

Staff Training Afternoon: Change of date to Wednesday 24 February

We have moved the next Staff Training Afternoon from Tuesday 9 March to Wednesday 24 February. This is to allow us to plan for students returning to school should the government decide students are to return from Monday 8 March. If this is not the case then it will give us the opportunity to make further improvements to our online learning provision.

Teachers will teach live lessons during the morning for periods one to three, but there will not be any lessons after 12.15. Students can choose whether to enjoy an afternoon off or to use the time to revise topics covered so far this term.

Students attending Skeleton School will finish between 12.10 and 12.20. Year 7 will finish at 12.10, Year 8 and Year 9 at 12.15 and Year 10 and Year 11 at 12.20. As the number of students attending Skeleton School are small, parents wishing to come in by car are welcome to drive into the car park at this time. If any students need to travel by school transport on this date, please could you let us know by emailing admin@jmhs.hereford.sch.uk.

Live Teams lessons and online learning

Attendance rates for online lessons are currently averaging 96%. Teachers are putting in place more strategies to check students are engaging with the lesson and completing tasks set, although we have stressed to teachers that

teaching the lessons well and to a high standard is our highest priority and even more important than checking all the class are actively working. The school and our teachers are continually working to improve the quality of our live Teams lessons. Action taken over the last fortnight includes:

- Purchasing and installing new visualizers in 28 classrooms with video cameras and high-quality microphones to enable better sound quality, high quality live demonstrations and for teachers who wish to do so to switch cameras on during live lessons.
- Provision of better microphones for teachers delivering lessons from offices.
- Using a survey of teachers on using Teams for teaching to share top tips and identifying technical and other problems and then tackling these problems in a systematic way.
- Use of the teacher training afternoon to provide training for teachers within faculty teams on using Teams effectively including use of 'quizzes', 'assignments', 'notebook' and other techniques and strategies.
- Supplying all answers in the parental survey to all staff, so that teachers can read feedback for themselves and use this to inform improvements to Teams teaching.

We would like to remind students and parents who are experiencing problems with live lessons to report these immediately to Mr Henderson, our ICT manager, so we can diagnose the problem and rectify this when possible.

Curriculum Plans for the Spring Term

The topics we are covering this term and the key learning points are summarised on the JMHS website in the Curriculum section, they can be viewed here:

<https://www.jmhs.hereford.sch.uk/curriculum/spring-2021-curriculum/>

Please note that, as we do not know when the current lockdown will finish, the topics covered may change later this term for some subjects.

Laptops and devices for online learning

Mr Hammond, our Assistant Headteacher, has been working hard to distribute Chrome Book laptops to families where students do not have access to a computer. To the best of our knowledge, we have now supplied Chrome Books to every family who needs one. If you do not have access to a lap top and wish to loan a Chrome Book, please contact Mr Hammond at Peter.hammond@jmhs.hereford.sch.uk.

Skeleton School

We now have approximately 55 vulnerable students and children of key workers attending each day. Students who are attending, are concentrating well and are maintaining social distancing. They complete the same lessons via Teams as children at home, whilst being supervised by teaching assistants with regular visits from Year Leaders.

The definition of students who can attend skeleton school can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

If your child meets the criteria and you need to book a place, please email Mr Collard at the 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 contact Mr Collard to do so.

Grades for Year 11 and Year 13

We are still awaiting information from the DFE and OFQUAL on how GCSE, A-Level or vocational grades are to be awarded in 2021. As we do not know how the grades will be awarded and whether students will be required to take assessments set by the exam boards, we have decided not to set dates for mock examinations until we have this information.

In order to help Year 11 and Year 13 students achieve as well as they can we will:

- Ensure early completion of all topics in the syllabus to allow sufficient time for revision.
- Prioritise high quality teaching and regular feedback for Year 11 and Year 13.
- Ensure students are thoroughly prepared for tests or assessments.
- Make sure grades awarded are a true reflection of a student's knowledge, skills and understanding in a subject.
- Ensure teachers receive high quality professional support and advice in making difficult judgements about exam grades.

Our advice to Year 11 and Year 13 students to maximise their chances of success is:

- Attend every lesson, focus fully and complete every task set to a high standard.
- Spend sufficient time on assessed pieces of work and always give it your best shot.
- Act on feedback given by your teachers and ask for help when you need it.
- Learn the work as you cover it in class and do not leave it to last minute revision.

Prefect Application Process for Year 10

Seventy Year 10 students who met the criteria for applying to be a prefect attended an online assembly with myself and Mr Bees on Tuesday 2 February. The deadline for receiving applications is Friday 12 February and the quality of applications I have so far received has been consistently high. If any student has not been able to apply (eg due to ill health), please could parents contact Mrs Sutcliffe. In the fortnight after the half term we will let Year 10 students know whether they have been successful with their application. There will be a further opportunity for Year 10 students who did not meet the criteria this time to apply at the end of the Summer Term.

Materials to support home learning

GCSE and Key Stage Three Art Packs

Our Art Department have prepared approximately 200 home study packs for GCSE Art students and students in Y7 & Y8. The packs include a sketchbook, watercolour and graphite pencils, water colour and acrylic paints, paint brushes, fine liner pens and other equipment supplied in a storage box which can be collected from Reception on Tuesday and Thursday mornings during term time by a student or parent between 0930 and 1200. The majority of packs have now been collected, but we will compile more if needed. If you study GCSE Art or are in Y7 or Y8 and have not yet collected yours, we would encourage you to do so in the week following the half term holiday.

Exercise books

We know that some students are in need of exercise books to support their online learning at home. Although writing within exercise books is not mandatory and students, if they have access and wish to do so, can continue to use paper at home. For students requiring blank exercise books, we are now making these available for collection from Reception every Tuesday and Thursday mornings from 09.30 until 12.00.

Collecting materials to support home learning

The protocol for picking up your art box or exercise books is given below:

1. Do not come to JMHS if you are displaying any COVID-19 symptoms, are self-isolating or shielding.
2. Remain in the carpark outside and telephone Reception (01531 631012 option 5) stating your requirements.
3. **Do not come into Reception.** A Receptionist will then bring the books outside to you.
4. If your initial **telephone call is not answered, please leave a message and your request will be actioned as soon as possible. Do not come into Reception.**

Y8 Subject Choice Interviews

Over the past three weeks we have carried out over 150 options interviews with Year 8 students using Microsoft Teams. We have been impressed with how knowledgeable Year 8 students have been about their choices, the research they have done on the subjects they are choosing and their thinking behind their choices. With these interviews complete, Mrs Laidler and Mrs Alcock (our timetabling team) will collate the choices and start the process of fitting students into classes after half term. They will contact parents before the Easter Holiday to let

them know whether students have been allocated their choices or whether we will need to use their reserve choice.

Parents' Evenings

To enable us to offer parents' evenings this year we are using an online system called Schoolcloud. Schoolcloud allows parents and carers to book appointments online, and then 'meet' the teachers via five-minute meetings with audio and video. Despite our first scheduled event being cancelled because of a nationwide fault in the Schoolcloud system, we have since held two parents' evenings. Aside from a few minor glitches sometimes experienced with live online meetings, both events were successful. Several parents and carers have contacted us to say that they found the system to be easy to use and convenient. There are four remaining events, and we will provide parents and carers with relevant links and guidance in due course.

Plans for next half term

We do not yet have a confirmed date for when all students will return to school. The Prime Minister has said if possible he would like all pupils to return to school on Monday 8 March. We are currently making plans for all students to return to JMHS on this date, but are aware that this may change. In the meantime, for at least the first two weeks of next term we will continue with live teaching of Teams lessons following the school timetable and try to continually find ways to gradually improve the quality of learning and teaching.

As soon as we have a date for all pupils to return to school, we will write to parents detailing the arrangements for students returning to JMHS.

Events and key dates for the Spring Term

- Friday 12 February: Year 10 deadline for prefect applications
- Monday 15 February 2021 – Friday 19 February 2021: Half Term
- Wednesday 24 February 2021: Staff Training Afternoon – students depart at 12.10/12.25pm
- Thursday 25 February 2021: Year 10 Parents' Evening - Virtual
- Thursday 4 March 2021: Year 9 Parent' Evening – Virtual
- Monday 8 March 2021: Possible date for all students to return to JMHS
- Thursday 11 March 2020: Year 11 Parents' Evening – Virtual
- Thursday 1 April 2020: Term ends at 3.15pm

... And finally

After such a challenging and different half term, I would like to wish all students, staff and families a safe, relaxing and enjoyable half term break

With my very best wishes



Andrew Evans
Headteacher