



11 January 2021

Dear students, parents, and carers

Following a dramatic and highly unusual first week of the Spring Term, I write to update you on several important areas.

Live Teams lessons and online learning

Teachers, students and parents have reported that delivering live lessons with Microsoft Teams is going well. Average attendance is now over 90% for all year groups and over 95% in Year 7, Year 11 and the Sixth Form. Year Leaders are phoning parents in the small number of cases where students are not logging onto lessons.

Teachers and students are commenting that the technology is now working well and that they are becoming more confident with using Teams for delivering and participating in lessons. Teachers are telling me that they have been most impressed with the enthusiasm and effort the vast majority of students are putting into their lessons and students and parents have been letting us know how much they appreciate the teachers working so hard to deliver high quality live lessons.

Some glitches are occurring on an occasional basis, but these are usually solved by our excellent IT Support Team.

I have attached our guide to online learning which details how we expect students to work online, how we will give feedback to students, answers some common questions we receive from students, gives technical advice and contains a list of email addresses for all staff. We hope you find this useful, but do let us know if you have any further questions.

Next week we will send out a link to a survey which students and parents can complete to give us feedback on how useful you have found the live lessons and your suggestions for areas for improvement.

Laptops and devices for online learning

Following our survey of families about IT devices and internet access at home, Mr Hammond has identified families where each child does not have a laptop or computer to work from home. THE DFE have promised us a delivery of 38 laptops we can lend to families this week and we will distribute these to families where we have identified the greatest need as soon as they arrive. It is also possible to access Microsoft Teams on PlayStation 4 and information about this is included in the attached guide.

We are participating in an excellent scheme called Laptops2Kids, whereby old laptops donated by companies or individuals are refurbished, made safe, converted into Chrome Books and distributed to families who need a device. We believe this is an excellent scheme and have given further details below.

Laptop2Kids

Right now there are hundreds of children across Herefordshire without the technology needed to do their school work remotely. We believe that in these challenging times no child should be left behind just because they need to isolate or stay at home during the lockdown. This is a big issue in Herefordshire - but it can be fixed by us. Locally.

The devices we need are already here. There are thousands of old, unused laptops or tablets sitting on shelves or at the back of an office gathering dust. These are just what we need. And this is where we can all help.

We have brought together a small, enthusiastic team of local organisations and charities, supported by industry-leading technology companies, to provide the skills, expertise and capability to make this real. Local businesses. Local task force. Helping local schools.

We will ensure all of your personal or business data is securely erased. For free. And then make sure the devices go to the schools and on to the children who need them most. And you can be assured that your generous donation will go directly to helping the children in your local Herefordshire schools.

So how do you help? Please visit our website at www.laptops2kids.co.uk where you can contact us and find out more about how the donation process works. And if you are not able to donate, please support us by sharing information about the scheme with your family, friends and within your workplaces. The more people who know about this, the more children we can help.

Skeleton School

We now have 40-50 bookings per day for vulnerable children and children of key workers for each day this week. Last week the students who attended worked with excellent concentration and focus throughout the school day. They completed the same lessons via Teams as other children did at home, whilst being supervised by teaching assistants with regular visits from Year Leaders.

The government have now changed the definition of groups who can attend skeleton school to include those students who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study). The updated criteria in full 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 email address 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.

Examinations for Year 11 and Year 13

You may already be aware that the Secretary of State for Education has announced that there will be no exams in the summer for Year 11 students and Sixth Form students who were due to sit GCSE, A-level, and AS-level exams this school year. Although schools have no details at this stage, he indicated that 'teacher assessed' grades will be used. The government will work with Ofqual (the examinations regulator) and examination boards to devise a mechanism. As in normal circumstances, it is essential that students continue to work hard with their studies. Attending online lessons, completing homework and other forms of assessment are all still vital. This is also the case for students studying for BTEC, Cambridge National, and RSL qualifications. When we have further useful information, we will contact students, parents, and carers.

We would like to assure all Year 11 and Year 13 students and their parents that we will take great care to award GCSE and A-Level grades accurately, taking account of students' knowledge, their work and their performance in tests and exams. Every teacher will receive guidance and support from another experienced and skilled teacher when allocating grades and a thorough moderation process will be put in place. Last year on results day, it was clear that students regarded the grades awarded as fair and accurate and we will work extremely hard to make sure this is the case with 2021 results.

We will also make sure that students receive excellent support in moving on to the next stage of their life whether this is employment, an apprenticeship, sixth form, college or university. In particular we will ensure that all applicants to JM6 who have shown a good attitude to their studies in Year 11 will be offered a place in our sixth form regardless of grades.

Asymptomatic Testing Programme

A dedicated team consisting of 8 members of our support staff team have this week set up our testing programme from scratch, undertaken training, developed procedures and set up safe and secure testing stations. They trialled testing staff on Friday and from today all staff who are working in school were able to book a test. In the week commencing Monday 18 January we will begin voluntary tests for students who are attending Skeleton School. I would like to thank and congratulate the testing team who have worked magnificently in setting up the programme in addition to their usual roles. We will send a separate communication to parents of students attending Skeleton School about giving consent and booking a test.

Christmas Jumper Day

We would like to thank students and parents for their generous donations on the last day of term for Christmas Jumper Day. In all we raised £600 for Hope, an excellent local charity.

HOPE is a registered UK charity set up in 2009. They support young people when a close family member is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness, such as cancer or even Covid-19. They support young people aged 11-25 across the UK right from the point of diagnosis and for however long they need, and also offer a face-to-face service for those aged 5-25 in Herefordshire. HOPE have a group of highly trained, sensitive professionals and who will do everything they can to support children who need us.

Support from form tutors

We have decided not to require tutors to deliver tutor time sessions which are usually scheduled from 12.15pm-12.45pm or from 12.45pm-13.15pm as we feel students need an hour's break at lunchtime after three hours of online lessons in the morning. Occasionally there will be a tutor session for a specific purpose eg to help students from Year 8 choose their GCSE course. Even though we are not running tutor sessions, we would encourage parents who wish to speak about support for their son or daughter to contact their form tutor via email.

Events and key dates for the Spring Term

- 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

Congratulations to all students and staff for showing such resilience and determination in working on the online lessons during the first work of term, you deserve great credit for the way that you have conducted yourselves.

With my very best wishes



Andrew Evans
Headteacher