

12<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Parent/Carer

As we come to the end of another challenging, yet successful half term, I wanted to update you with where things stand at the moment. The educational picture continues to evolve and so our response needs to remain fluid. This letter covers the following key messages:

1. **THANK YOU AND WELL DONE**
2. **MEDIA SPECULATION**
3. **NEXT HALF TERM**
  - **RETURN TO SCHOOL?**
  - **Lateral Flow Device TESTING?**
  - **INSET DAY & VIRTUAL CAREERS SHOW on 3<sup>rd</sup> March**
4. **EXAMINATIONS UPDATE**
5. **Mr TUTINO's NOVEL**

## 1. **THANK YOU AND WELL DONE**

Firstly, thank you for your support and understanding over the last 6 weeks. We are all trying to find a way through this and keep improving, something that I hope has been evident during this second school closure. Everybody's circumstances are different; some are flourishing with online learning; most are adapting well and a few are really struggling. **I am inclined to take an optimistic view of how well the overwhelming majority of people have coped. Students and staff should be commended for engaging so positively with the challenges of online learning.** By following a daily timetable with lots of live lessons and interactions with staff and their peers in classes and tutor groups, we have managed to maintain key fundamentals of a regular routine, clear expectations and high quality, varied educational provision. Whilst it is not possible to replicate the diet we could offer in school, we have endeavoured to find ways to keep students engaged and enthused, including the using breakout rooms in Teams and innovative ways of assessing progress. Those vulnerable and key worker students in school have followed the same diet and it has been heartening seeing some people thriving in adversity. We have endeavoured to check in regularly with those who have been finding it most challenging, and have issued laptops, dongles and free school meals vouchers to many families.

We are grateful for your ongoing support and understand that it is very challenging and sometimes frustrating for parents who are trying to work effectively from home and support the learning and personal needs of children 24/7. However, remote parents' evenings seem to have been very well received and are one of many new practices that we will look to utilise going forwards. We all want the same thing which is for our students to be safe, happy and successfully engaged with their learning. For the most part, we have managed to achieve that. Congratulations to students, parents and staff for endeavouring to make the most of this imperfect situation.

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### Stratford upon Avon School

Alcester Road, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire, CV37 9DH  
[www.stratforduponavonschool.com](http://www.stratforduponavonschool.com) Email: [staff@stratfordschool.co.uk](mailto:staff@stratfordschool.co.uk) Tel: 01789 268051

#### Mr N Wallace – Headteacher

Stratford upon Avon School, a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales under number 07690776, whose registered office is Stratford upon Avon School, Alcester Road, Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire, CV37 9DH

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## 2. MEDIA SPECULATION

The last week has seen another barrage of misleading and unhelpful media speculation regarding education. It can be despairing being bombarded almost daily with talk of the youth mental health crisis, a Covid generation afflicted by lost learning, rumblings about extending school days and term continuing into the summer holiday and the ongoing debate about when students should return to school. Today some news outlets are quoting Robert Halfon MP, Tory chairman of the Education Select Committee, saying “We need to make sure March 8<sup>th</sup> is signed in blood”, an unfortunate turn of phrase in the midst of a pandemic.

**The catastrophising about the state of education and the allegedly detrimental impact all of this is having on young people needs putting into perspective.** Alas, the additional skills students have acquired during this period are often overlooked, including using technology in different ways, learning greater self-reliance and resilience. It would be helpful to stop medicalising feeling lonely, bored, confused, anxious, worried and sad. These are natural appropriate responses to an incredibly stressful situation. These are feelings people will experience throughout their lives and do not necessarily mean that youngsters have a mental illness.

Our values statement as a school explains that *“We work better and are more productive when we feel good about ourselves and trust each other”*; if only all of the politicians and media would adopt the same message. What is required is a fair, focused and fearless assessment of the big picture; one that acknowledges the wider purposes of education. The disadvantaged gap is not simply a problem for schools; it is rooted in the endemic socio-economic inequalities that exist. Instead of fixating on examinations and cramming knowledge, I hope that the government will reassess the direction of travel and broaden their focus away from the EBACC so that they genuinely create the conditions that encourage all schools and the wider society to promote a broader curriculum to meet the needs of all learners, including the ‘forgotten third’ of students who the current exam system disadvantages.

## 3. NEXT HALF TERM

**The following sections are designed to advise you of our current thinking. However, the details may be subject to change in light of government announcements that are expected in the week beginning 22<sup>nd</sup> February.**

### ➤ RETURN TO SCHOOL?

The government announced that the earliest date for students to return to schools would be Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March and that they would give schools two weeks advance notice, so we await further details in due course. We certainly hope to be able to welcome students back then if it is deemed safe to do so.

### ➤ Lateral Flow Device TESTING?

The government have previously announced that they expect all secondary schools to conduct Lateral Flow Device tests to help students and staff to remain in school safely, something we have been doing over recent weeks for those who have been working in the school building. Assuming that expectation doesn't change, we are planning for all students who have parental consent (up to age 15) or consent themselves via their parents (age 16 and over) to be tested twice before they return to school, so that we can reduce the likelihood of possible transmission of Covid. As things stand, we are intending for all students to be tested on either Monday 1<sup>st</sup> or Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March, with second tests taken on either Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> or Friday 5<sup>th</sup>. Students will be expected to come into school just to be tested twice, according to an alphabetical rota, then go home. The test is voluntary, but I would encourage everyone to take it. I will write to you again straight after half term including more detailed information about our testing arrangements and with a parental consent form for the testing which will require your response.

## ➤ INSET DAY & VIRTUAL CAREERS SHOW on 3<sup>rd</sup> March

We are intending to reschedule our **next INSET Day for Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March** (it had been postponed from Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February). This will enable us to plan effectively for the anticipated return of large numbers of students the following week. The school will be closed for students that day (this includes those who have been in school throughout the current school closure) and no online lessons will be set. However, this gives the students the opportunity to attend the **Coventry and Warwickshire Virtual Careers Show** which is taking place on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March and I would direct students towards their **live day running from 1pm - 7pm**. This digital event is open to students and parents from all year groups, so I would urge you to register via the website <https://cwcareershub.vfairs.com/> which contains further details.

## 4. EXAMINATIONS UPDATE

We are awaiting the findings from the recent Ofqual consultation regarding how students will be assessed this summer given the absence of traditional external examinations. Details are expected to be released at the end of the month. It certainly looks likely that students will be assessed relatively late in the summer term – to maximise time for teaching and learning, and maintain student engagement and motivation. We are likely to be required to draw on a broad range of assessment – with further guidance anticipated from exam boards about what this might include. Rest assured that we will do all we can to continue to motivate and support our students so they can secure the grades they deserve. **In the meantime, our students need to continue doing all they can to convince us they deserve really good grades - engagement with remote learning is absolutely essential, along with a proactive return to school in due course.**

## 5. Mr TUTINO's NOVEL

And finally, if your son/daughter is looking for something to read over half term, you may be tempted to order them a copy of Mr Tutino's novel 'Soot'. Here is a link to the publisher's website, where you can buy a copy <https://www.austinmacauley.com/book/soot-0>. ; the perfect half term treat which I'm sure he'd happily sign in due course!

Thank you for your ongoing support as we continue to navigate these rapidly changing times. Please ensure that your son or daughter takes a break from their remote learning next week and is able to relax safely. We all need to take the time to look after ourselves in the current situation. However, we hope that after a break, students are then fired up & raring to go again after half term with the prospect of an imminent physical return to school. With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Neil Wallace  
Headteacher