

9th September 2020

Dear Parents & Carers,

I am writing to welcome you all in these unique circumstances at the start of the academic year. It has certainly been a summer like no other in terms of education news hogging the headlines. With the uncertainty caused by government dithering and U-turns, I'm sure we've all found it refreshing to get back to school, albeit with some slightly different operating procedures. We have thought long and hard about how to safely reopen and now need to get 180 staff, 1600+ students and 3000+ parents on message, day after day! **The fact that attendance was UP 0.9% on the first week last year suggests that we have collectively made an excellent start.** The students obviously missed us as much as we missed them!

This letter contains information about:

- **LESSON GRADES**
- **HOMEWORK AND MICROSOFT TEAMS**
- **HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION**
- **VIRTUAL SCHOOL TOUR AND NEW WEBSITE IMMINENT**
- **EARLY CLOSURES and CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**
- **EXAMINATION RESULTS**

LESSON GRADES

Our philosophy hasn't changed. We're here to Engage, Enthuse & Inspire students and want to ensure that they have a myriad of opportunities to Learn, Contribute and Lead. **We are continuing to issue 'Attitude to Learning' grades so that you are aware on a daily basis of excellent or poor performance during lessons.** Grades 1 and 2 will continue to be issued for Excellent or Good performance. You will continue to receive a daily automated message whenever a student has a lesson that exceeds or falls short of our expectations. A grade 3 will be issued for insufficient effort/work and a 4 for disruptive behaviour. **Students who receive a grade 3 or 4 during a lesson will automatically be kept behind for 10 minutes by their period 8 teacher.** This should reinforce the importance of working hard and completing work in lessons by providing a same-day response.

HOMEWORK AND MICROSOFT TEAMS

We will be developing our online provision and use of Microsoft Teams as part of what we do daily for everyone, especially for homework, if students are having to stay at home or in the event of another partial or full closure. Please note that:

- From now on all classes will have a group assigned on Microsoft Teams.
- All students will be able to access Teams using their school e-mail addresses (new students will have these addresses and login details confirmed shortly) either via the Teams desktop app, Teams via browser or the Teams mobile/tablet apps.

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- At the start of a unit of work, teachers will post support materials to the Teams group to provide reference and revision help throughout that unit.
- **Homeworks will be set regularly for all subjects** (though in proportion to the time allocated in the timetable) **and will all now be recorded as an assignment on Teams.**
- **We will no longer be logging the setting of Homework on MCAS to minimise duplication in school.** Students will still be expected to note Homework in their planners and we encourage parents keen to know about the Homework set for their child to either review their planners or ask to see their Teams assignments.

All students will be expected to complete the homework set, even if they are absent from school. Not being in school when the homework was set or when it is due is not a valid reason for not completing it. Where students have been significantly unwell and unable to complete their work for a period of time we will take this into account.

If a student was absent for lessons that the homework relates to they can use the unit support materials to help them with the homework and contact their teachers via Teams chat if unable to ask questions in school.

Immediate remote provision of work for all students in case of self isolation or a school closure will be “do your homework on Teams”. If the absence or school closure becomes something that has to be in place for a longer term we will then start setting more extensive online work.

We will log any failure to complete homework or independent learning via the normal behaviour system, but we will no longer be issuing detentions for missing homework. A count of missed homeworks will be shown on school reports by subject, and parents of students who miss this regularly are likely to receive follow up contact from the teachers involved. Similarly, excellent homeworks will receive positive logs and other praise.

In the case where your child has a significant barrier to accessing Microsoft Teams please contact your child’s College Leader and/or Progress Leader as depending on circumstances the school may be able to provide additional support.

HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION

As well as keeping an eye on your child’s use of Microsoft Teams, please **check/sign the student planner weekly** and you can also log onto **My Child at School** to find other key information. I would ask you to build a relationship with your child’s tutor as the first point of contact, though individual teaching staff may be contacted directly by their initialsurname@stratfordschool.co.uk e.g. nwallace@stratfordschool.co.uk.

For obvious reasons we are currently unable to invite large numbers of parents into school so you will shortly be receiving more details about how we will replace Tutor Evenings this year.

VIRTUAL SCHOOL TOUR AND NEW WEBSITE IMMINENT

We now have an amazing virtual tour of the school featuring messages from lots of different colleagues. If you haven’t seen it, check out the website today for the virtual tour. I’m sure you will be impressed and it is something that we will continue to update for the benefit of prospective students, parents and colleagues. We are soon about to go live with a new website as well.

EARLY CLOSURES and CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Please note that there is a **Staff Learning Day on Friday 25th September**, when the school will be closed to students. To assist with our ongoing planning and curriculum development, **we will also be closing to students at 1.20pm on five occasions** for staff training throughout the academic year. These early closures for staff training will be on the following dates:

- **Monday, 19th October**
- **Tuesday 17th November**
- **Thursday 28th January**

- **Friday 12th February**
- **Wednesday 10th March**

All students will have 4 full lessons on those days. Lunch service will still be available on those days after lessons have finished at 1.20pm. However, school buses will remain at their normal time on all of these dates. If you wish your child to remain in school until 3.10pm please inform their form tutor so that we can make alternative arrangements.

EXAMINATION RESULTS

Finally, congratulations to our former Year 11 and Year 13 who, after what was widely described as an examinations fiasco, eventually received their results. The Centre Assessed Grades submitted by schools were not plucked out of the air, but were a robust professional view of what individuals would have achieved given the hard work put in by students and staff over the last few years.

If we've learned anything from the examinations saga, it is surely that our education system has become far too obsessed with terminal examinations and league tables that are used to drive accountability measures. The sad truth is that in reality our system is configured to consign a third of young people to leaving school feeling that they have fallen short. Traditionally the focus on results day falls on high achieving individuals jumping for joy, rather than the 'Forgotten Third'. Perhaps the absence of such images this year, will enable politicians to reflect for a moment on how the system might look. In the longer term, we have to think again about our fixation on an exam-driven system. Lessons from the summer must surely lead us to question whether government is making us assess learning in the most appropriate way. How many jobs rely on people sitting down and providing a handwritten response for two hours based on memory? Perhaps the time has come for our political leaders to think more creatively. Alas, for now, we are constrained to work within the current system.

Nevertheless, we look forward to working closely together to ensure that your daughter/son has a safe, happy and successful academic year. We have worked extremely hard over recent months to create the right environment for everybody to prosper. Please follow us on twitter [@StraUponAvonSch](#) or check the school website www.stratforduponavonschool.com for regular updates. Thank you for your understanding and ongoing support,

Yours sincerely,



Mr Neil Wallace
Headteacher