

Dear Parents,

Welcome back to the New Year. I am so sorry that, so soon after sending out plans for the term ahead, I am writing to let you know that they no longer apply. As we seem to have been saying for a while, it promises to be different to any that we have seen before. Nevertheless, we are in a very good position as a school, and can continue to support our pupils and families with great confidence in what we are doing. I am particularly sorry for the overseas boarders who made special plans to get here early for the term, ready to start on 11th January, only to find that the school will be closed. We are working closely with the families directly affected, in order to get the boarders home, or to continue to host them here for remote learning at school, if it is difficult to get back.

The latest move to lockdown, with the need to go back to full remote learning is frustrating, after such a good term before Christmas, but does seem the only possible move, given the current numbers, and unlike the previous lockdowns, this time, we have vaccination underway, and can hopefully start to see a proper way through the pandemic for all. We are ready to help and support all of our learners during the coming weeks, to provide a rich and broad educational experience, and to make sure that everyone is in as good a place as they can be for the return to in school learning later this term.

In addition to this message, I will be sending a short video message to all pupils, which you can see [here](#).

Start of Term and teaching

We will be beginning term on Monday, with a Tutor Period at 8.30am for all students. Tutor periods will be a daily occurrence, and will serve as 'registration' as well, so pupils must log in for those meetings, ready to start the school day. Lessons will follow, and we have taken the decision to follow the normal school timetable (as on the MIS), so the first lesson will be at 8.50am (Monday 1, week B). Because we are following the timetable, we will also have Saturday morning lessons. We are also focusing on a much greater proportion of live teaching, through google meet. For those who are in different time zones, lessons will be recorded, so that they can be reviewed. Similarly, if any student is finding it hard to follow the lessons, these can be revisited through the google classroom. It is felt that these changes are essential to support our key aims for the term, to support our students pastorally, to promote progress in learning, and to head back closer to normality, ready for when we are back in school (hopefully in the second half of this term).

Pastoral care

As well as the daily tutorials, and the personal input of Tutors, HMs will be leading on the pastoral care for all the pupils in their houses, and will stay in close contact

with all pupils, but particularly those who need the most support. Pastoral care is something that Felsted is rightly known for, and we are determined to provide the best care that we can during this challenging time. Lindsey Page (Wellbeing) and Nigel Little (Chaplaincy) will be supporting and contributing to this important work as well.

Exams

We have had to make the decision to postpone both A Level and IB mocks (dates to be decided) due to the lockdown. I am sure that you would agree that is the only sensible approach under the circumstances. Meanwhile, the government has stated today that GCSE and A Level exams will not be going ahead in the anticipated format, and that assessment will be carried out in another way. We expect that this will mean Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs), so we will make a decision as to the best way to get the information for those grades (in other words, A Level mocks might be required, or might not be necessary - no decision has currently been taken). The message on CAGs is that we will be giving pupils multiple opportunities to demonstrate their best work to us (it is important for students to remember that they should not be overly worried or stressed about any individual piece of work, as it the overall picture that matters, not any one piece of work). We can then put forward grades that are reflective of the potential of each student, as well as being reflective of prior attainment. We will seek to be fair, but positive in our assessment of each individual. At present, we are still awaiting more information from the Government on this subject.

As things stand, IB exams are still due to go ahead in early May, in slightly reduced form, in which case, we will want to run some mock exams to prepare students for these. BTEC exams are still going ahead, and we are working out how best to hold the PE BTEC exam that is due to take place at the end of next week for exam candidates in that subject.

Co-curricular provision

We are keen to ensure that we provide a high level of co-curricular provision in all areas during lockdown, with sports sessions for all (Tuesday/Thursday/Saturday), and the same vibrancy in music and drama, and many other activities, that we managed to achieve before Christmas. More details about this will follow shortly.

Critical workers' children

With regards to provision for the children of critical workers, we are working on the following guidance from the Government and the Local Authority, who state: 'The purpose of the critical worker only provision is to enable those that are critical to the Covid 19 response to go to work, whilst reducing the number of children in school as much as possible. This is to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus.

Therefore if it is possible for children to remain at home, they should do so. This includes where parents are working from home.' It is on this basis where we will be

able to allocate places for children. Please bear in mind the purpose of the lockdown and the closure of the school site is to reduce the spread of the virus and keep the number of people (children and staff) in school to an absolute minimum. In order to plan accordingly, we need to know how many places are required. Please let Michelle Wells (dhpa@felsted.org) know by return if you hope to use this provision. At the very latest, we would need to know by Thursday 7th January.

School fees

Due to the lack of notice, and the lack of information relating to length of the lockdown, we do not feel that it is appropriate or possible to announce any changes to this term's fee levels. Instead, we will look at our costs in relation to this term, the impact on education (and of course boarding), and make appropriate adjustments to the bills for next term. I hope that you will support this approach, and recognise that the school has tried throughout to be fair and proportionate in its approach, offering significant reductions last summer term, well in excess of the costs saved. If anyone faces particular challenges with this term's fees, it is important that you make contact with the Bursar as soon as possible (bursar@felsted.org).

Collection of books

Some of our pupils will need to come into school in order to collect their books for remote learning. Where that is the case, this should only be done via an appointment made with their HM, as there should be no 'meeting' with other students.

There is much more that will be said in the coming days, as we move towards **Felsted At Home '21**, but I hope that this information helps you to continue to get ready for the new term. Remote learning is a genuinely collaborative experience, and at its best can help young people to develop independent learning skills, and great resilience. Please do talk to us if you are worried about your child's progress, and do help them to get involved not just in the academic, but also the co-curricular and social elements of their education, as much as possible. While we are confident that we can deliver an excellent online learning experience, we are all looking forward to the time when everyone can be back at Felsted.

All best wishes,

Chris