



June 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian

At this time of the year I would normally be writing to wish you and your family well for the summer break and to outline plans for the start of the new academic year. I hope that you have a very relaxing and peaceful summer, however during these unprecedented times the definitive plan for the new academic year, across schools in Northern Ireland, still remains unclear. It is very important that pupils return to school, as soon as it is safe to do so in accordance with Government Guidance. Remote learning has facilitated, in the vast majority of cases, a continuity of learning, but it is not a substitute for pupils gaining a holistic education alongside their peers and friends, whilst having the opportunity to enjoy the extra and co-curricular life of the school. We all hope and pray that pupils, parents and colleagues will be able to return to 'normal life' as soon as the Government's scientific advisors assure us that it is safe to do so. Undoubtedly, our sense of togetherness has seen us through these challenging months. I wish to reiterate my thanks to our pupils, parents, my colleagues and the wider community for all of their considerable efforts in maintaining effective learning in our community during this difficult and uncertain period.

I'm sure that you will have read and heard many of the Covid-19 related articles in the media, however we understand notification from the Education Minister of the date on which schools will re-open for pupils is imminent. The Department of Education will also issue detailed guidance for all schools in the coming days. Therefore, the rest of term will be very busy for staff as they plan for the next academic year. Our main priority must now be to plan, in partnership, for a new way of working and learning - safely and effectively. As part of this process, we are arranging a series of meetings and training around remote learning and discussing key issues which will need to be addressed before pupils return to school. In order to create time for colleagues to undertake these important tasks, we are planning to scale back the work that teachers have been undertaking with their classes from Monday 22 June until the end of term. Project work will be set for students to complete in some subjects over this period, but there will be no formal expectation of contact between pupils and teachers. I trust that you understand and appreciate my reasons for reaching this decision.

I know that dates for returning to school, timetable and attendance structures, and remote learning are all pressing issues, however, at the moment, we do not have definitive answers. It is clear Years 12 & 14 (currently Years 11 & 13 - 2019/20 academic year) will return to school first, and other year groups will return at a later date when we are instructed that it is safe to increase the number of pupils in the building. The Minister and DE will inform schools specifically about the return of year group(s) and provide dates. I understand that this lack of clarity causes considerable frustration and indeed anxiety for pupils and parents/guardians. However, I will ensure that I keep you informed when we are aware of the exact details and facts. I do believe that it is not helpful to speculate about or pre-empt this information until it has been communicated to us by the relevant statutory authority. As I have endeavoured to do throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, I will update you with definitive information when it has been officially circulated to the School.

Induction programmes in August will need careful consideration on the basis of the DE Guidance, unfortunately, once again, I will only be able to write to our returning and new

pupils later in the summer, most likely at the start of August. Please note it is impossible to publish the usual Calendar of Events for 2020/21 at this time. We have placed a copy of the up-to-date uniform list on the school website (Policies/Documents section). I understand that some parents may be reluctant to purchase new items of uniform until return dates have been fully determined.

My thoughts and prayers continue to be with you and all of our pupils and indeed the new pupils that will be joining us in September. I empathise in particular with our current Year 14 pupils who have missed out on an important part of their final year in the school. I have asked the Senior Prefects to compile a presentation, which we will share online, outlining the educational journey of these outstanding young people.

Please note that the simplified end of year report for your child will be published via the Parent App prior to the end of the year. I hope that the information will provide an overview of progress during this past academic year.

My best wishes to you and your entire family. Please take care and stay safe.

Kind regards

R S McLoughlin
Principal
Banbridge Academy