

Wednesday 8th April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I promised we would keep in touch with you over Easter; this is the first of our holiday letters. Mrs Ashton writes in this newsletter that this evening marks the start of the festival of *Passover*, the important Jewish festival of freedom from slavery. I am sure there are many millions who yearn to be free from this “slavery” which our world is enduring. This week is Holy Week in the Christian Calendar culminating in Easter Sunday. Today is known as *Spy Wednesday*; and in more normal times it is marked by religious services where candles are extinguished.

### **Pupils in Schools**

We have a small number of children and staff in school each day. Today the pupils have had an Easter Egg hunt [social distancing being strictly observed] and also been cooking. Some of the local schools are open too including both Middle Schools and Wootton Lower School. Altogether there are around twenty pupils in these schools.

### **Distance Learning Survey**

A lot of work is on-going; we are having daily video conferences between different teams of staff. Yesterday, we had a Senior Leadership Team [SLT] meeting to review how distant learning is going and to look at the helpful suggestions some parents have made in the last two weeks. We also had a separate teaching and learning meeting on Monday and agreed that Mr Frazer would develop some answers to Frequently Asked Questions, including whether it is possible for a child to turn off notifications on Show My Homework!

Yesterday’s SLT meeting agreed **it would be very useful to gather the views of parents and carers on distant learning in a short survey**. The survey has nine questions and should take no more than three minutes to complete, per child. Therefore, I would be grateful, if over the next few days, you could complete it, once for every child you have at the Trust. We would like to analyse the results next Tuesday so the survey will close on Monday evening. Please click the link here to complete our survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FTNL2G2>

### **Ofqual’s Examination Guidance**

We have also been reviewing Ofqual’s Guidance on GCSE and A level examinations. The guidance is very helpful and it will enable us to work with Heads of Department after the Easter break to agree Centre Estimated Grades for all learners. The Trust has written to Ofqual to seek clarity on one or two points in the guidance before asking Heads of Department and other staff to begin the process of finalizing grades in the first few weeks of May.

### **Free School Meals**

We have mentioned before that the Trust recognizes there will be some families who are now living in different circumstances to those before Covid 19. There are likely to be more families where children are eligible for Free School Meals. If this applies to your family, please let us know.

Tomorrow morning, we will be delivering the next set of food parcels to families who have asked for them; **if you have requested a food parcel, please expect delivery by one of our team of volunteers between 9:30 am and 11:00 am**. Some families entitled to FSM have requested the government’s e-vouchers instead of a food parcel. In most cases these will be sent electronically tomorrow, or if recipients have requested otherwise, by post. A small number of families entitled to FSM are yet to let us whether they prefer a food parcel or e-vouchers. Once we have heard from these families we will respond as quickly as we can. Once again may I express my thanks to all the staff and others who are helping the Trust with this activity.

**Connolly Foundation Bursaries/Harpur Trust University Bursary Scheme/Alderman Newton Grant**

In earlier newsletters we have promoted each of these schemes. In terms of a current update:

**57%** of students eligible to apply for the Connolly Foundation Main Bursary have indicated they are intending to do so and are seeking help from Mrs Ashby, or they have already submitted their application to her. **This means 43% of students who could apply for up to £1,000 per year to support their university courses have not done so...** I can only reiterate to parents/carers please let your children know about this scheme. It is not means tested.

In terms of the means tested Harpur Trust University Bursary Scheme which is limited to students who have a Bedford Brough address, **Mr Detheridge tells me he has received only a very small number of expressions of interest, less than five.** This bursary is worth £1,200 per year over three years of an undergraduate degree course. There really must be more eligible students who could apply for this bursary.

We do not know how many students from Kimberley have applied for a grant from the Alderman Newton Foundation. Whilst this is a one-off grant limited to £500 and is dependent on a student having an address in Bedford Borough, I would urge you to get your child to look at it whether or not they are going to university or starting an apprenticeship then.

**Year 8 options**

Mr Freemantle has informed me only ten families with children in Year 8 are yet to submit their options form for Year 9 courses. Mrs Darlow has been chasing up these families; we hope to have all the requests in very soon.

**Student Bulletin ... *in a world where you can be anything ... be kind***

We continue to add information to our website and we would strongly commend our weekly Student Bulletin which is overseen by Mrs Genders. The Student Bulletin is on our website, under the Coronavirus Distance Learning link, just in case the following link does not work properly!

[https://30a0a3ae-f989-45df-a221-a3b2b6b596a1.filesusr.com/ugd/675635\\_c5c52d4e3c6e4c1ab7fd78ee6e837a7d.pdf](https://30a0a3ae-f989-45df-a221-a3b2b6b596a1.filesusr.com/ugd/675635_c5c52d4e3c6e4c1ab7fd78ee6e837a7d.pdf)

Amongst other slides is important information on how Year 10 pupils should apply to be considered for our Senior Student Leader positions. We are very keen that every Year 10 pupil is aware of this. We have some fantastic pupils in Year 10 who are natural leaders.

**News from Mr Frazer... this may be a popular newsletter item!**

Mr Frazer would like to thank Dr Mackay for sending him information on how pupils and students can manage email and push notifications on SMH. The link below takes you straight to the help guide on SMH which deals with notifications.

<https://help.teamsatchel.com/en/articles/2911879-managing-email-and-push-notifications>

Mr Frazer comments he *“does not believe he could add anything to the instructions which would make it any easier for parents/carers and more importantly the learners to change their notifications.”*

**News from Mrs McMorn**

We continue to provide our weekly assembly to support our community in reflecting on events and their own lives. This week, the assembly focuses on **learning at home** as well as why **learning in itself is useful**. This assembly, which is already on the website under the Coronavirus Distance Learning Link - will be shared via a link with all our students when tutors email and make contact in the week after the holidays. Mrs McMorn would encourage all learners and their families to watch the assembly as it is particularly relevant to the situation we find ourselves in.

**News from Mrs Ashton**

The month of April will see various religious observations and festivals being marked. If we were in school, we would have assemblies highlighting these religious observations. Our staff have prepared PowerPoints for this which will be published on the school website so that you and your children can access them.

Passover 2020 begins on Wednesday, April 8, and ends Thursday evening, April 16. Passover is a festival of freedom. It is the celebration of the Jews being freed from Egypt, known as the Exodus. It celebrates their transition from slavery to freedom.

For

Christians all over the world, the Holy Week, Sunday 5th April to Saturday 11th April – the days between Palm Sunday and Easter Day – Christians journey with Jesus from his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, to the last supper at which he gave his disciples the commandment that they should love one another, through to his betrayal, suffering and death. On Easter Sunday, 12th April, Christians all over the world celebrate Christ's resurrection, and the dawning of a new world in which love triumphs over death.

Ramadan for the year 2020 starts on the evening of Thursday 23rd April lasting 30 days and ending at sunset on Saturday 23rd May. Muslims observe the month of Ramadan, to mark that Allah gave the first chapters of the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad. During Ramadan, Muslims fast and abstain from pleasures. Muslims spend time in prayer to become closer to God. It is also a time for families to gather and share iftar, which is the family meal.

We wish all families with different religious observations our best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Michael Gleeson  
**Executive Principal**  
Wootton Academy Trust