

Wednesday 20 May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

How are we doing?

This week Senior Staff have been asking themselves the question, how well are we doing in providing support to our learners and to you, their parents and carers, during this period of enforced lockdown. We know that we have all been working really hard to provide an appropriate and well-rounded education, and support, to all of our learners at Wootton Upper School and Kimberley College. We know that we have adapted our plans over the weeks in response to feedback from you as parents and carers, and also from responses from your children. We have changed the way we set work, so that it does not come out at the weekend and given learners advice on how to switch off notifications if work has not been submitted. We have also developed the tasks we are setting for learners so that there is much more guidance for them on how they should approach each task, giving learners more choice on how they complete it, how much time they should spend completing tasks and hints about how they should approach them. All of these have been in response to what parents/carers have told us.

To aid communication we have written regular newsletters to our parents and carers – today's is the thirty-eighth in the series - as well as a weekly email every Monday to all our learners from their Form Tutor at Wootton Upper School, or their Pastoral Tutor at Kimberley College.

- ❖ Through the newsletter we have sought to set out as much information as we could as the situation developed, and we continue to do this as we await further guidance from the government about plans for face to face sessions for learners.
- ❖ Our newsletters have included information about funding opportunities including the Connolly Foundation and the Harpur Trust as well as information related to next steps for learners [e.g. University applications, careers opportunities, option choices and much more]
- ❖ Through the weekly email to students we have shared a bulletin with key messages about wellbeing, accessing support and positive strategies for wellbeing, as well as a link to a weekly assembly. All our assemblies are on our website.

On our websites, in addition to links to assemblies, and all our previous newsletters, we have added links we have previously advertised to wellbeing information and safeguarding information, including staying safe online. This week the Student Bulletin reminded learners about how to stay safe in the current climate, as well as celebrating pupil work, and weekly features such as a work out and a healthy recipe.

We have developed a Virtual Gallery – which lots of other schools have commented upon - as a vehicle for celebrating learners work.

If you have not previously engaged with these I would urge you to do so – there is a wealth of information and support, as well as heart-warming stories about our students. We do know that many parents and carers have accessed this information, because they have contacted us via emails and via the dedicated mobile phone numbers for safeguarding, SEND and pastoral support. The contact details for all teaching staff at both Wootton Upper School and Kimberley College can also be found here.

In addition to what we are doing for all our learners, we are also maintaining support for those who are more vulnerable. Our SEND and Safeguarding Teams continue to work with external agencies on a daily basis, and families and individual students are contacted very regularly when necessary to support them.

Each week we set work for all students from Year 9 to 13 and work is set in **all subjects** that they would study normally in school, including Personal, Social and Health Education and Careers. Each week we have shared a plan of the topics being studied, and parents and carers have said they welcome this overview of “what our pupils are learning this week” information. Work set has been tailored to the class, i.e. we have not set the same work in the same way for all students in a year group, to ensure that we are supporting each student to access learning. Activities have directed students to resources such as online textbooks e.g. Kerboodle, and online resources such as GCSE Bitesize and Oak National Academy.

We have set tasks in the main that have helped our learners to practise skills and knowledge; however, as time has gone on increasingly tasks are set linked to new learning. We know we will have to revisit these topics but have been really impressed by the resilience that many of our learners are showing. We have trialled a small number of online lessons with some students at Kimberley College, but not at Wootton Upper School. We know that a significant minority of children simply don't have access to the resources needed to access online learning. We have distributed paper packs of work to these families, with regular refreshes, and organised ways for work to be returned for assessment and feedback. We continue to work on feedback to students who have completed and submitted work, and continue to look at ways of doing this within the online system we have.

The Trust is also able to support families in gaining access to Microsoft Office applications without them having to pay to download them onto their PC, laptop or smart phone. We have already supported over 90 families in this way and encourage any families who do not currently have access to Word, PowerPoint, Excel etc to contact it@wootton.beds.sch.uk.

We have worked really hard to support families access Free School Meals, either through Food Parcels, or through the government e-voucher scheme.

It is important to us to try and provide the right level of support for all our learners and families, with weekly contact for all and more where needed. It is important that we continue to provide PSHE lessons, and the topics have been re-planned to make the content as appropriate as possible for a student learning at home, and probably on their own.

Bedford Borough Council has asked us to promote an online survey for parents/carers to fill in on how well schools are managing the challenges of providing support and learning to children during these difficult times. We have put a copy of the Chief Education Officer's letter on our website today which explains the Borough Council's rationale for undertaking the survey. We would encourage you to submit responses. It is fairly straightforward. You are asked to select the school/college from a drop-down menu and then submit a response for each of your children. Thank you in anticipation of your support in completing the survey.

<https://eu.surveymonkey.com/r/NWGG5KC>

Bedfordshire Music Trust Competition: News from Mr Hooper, Head of Music

During the Easter Holiday, the Bedfordshire Music Trust held a competition for musicians across the county. The competition was for musicians to record themselves playing a solo on their instrument and then get a friend to review it. I am pleased to say that Hannah Bushby, a Year 9 trumpeter, entered and won the competition, receiving a £25.00 Amazon voucher as her reward. Besides winning this competition, Hannah has also recently played The Last Post in her garden to celebrate VE Day. Well done, Hannah - a wonderful achievement.

If any other musicians are enjoying playing music at home, then please do not forget to upload your performances to our music Twitter page: @watmusicdept.

Causeway Education: News from Mrs Stewart

Causeway Education, a charity which supports state students through key transitions in their education experience, recently offered 13 Kimberley students a place on their mentoring programme. This valuable opportunity pairs each student with an online mentor who provides one to one guidance and feedback on their university personal statements. Whilst assisting the student to craft a competitive personal statement, the mentors will also be available online to answer questions the students might have about the whole university application process.

We are incredibly proud of the careers and university application support we offer to all students at Wootton and Kimberley and we convey our thanks to Causeway and to Wadham College, University of Oxford, our Oxford link college for both Wootton and Kimberley students, for enabling us to enhance our support for students.

EISG Bid

The Multi Academy Trust Board would like to thank Mrs McMorn who submitted a bid for £25,000 additional funding on behalf of the Trust to provide additional support for learners and families as we move out of the period of lock-down and seek to re-engage learners who have struggled through the process. There are a number of strands to the bid including offering to work with Bedford Borough Schools in our area [Wootton Lower, Broadmead Lower and Marston Vale Middle School] to support families.

EISG is an abbreviation for **Education Improvement Strategy Group**. Bedford Borough Council puts money aside from the money it receives from Central Government to enable this group to support schools in school improvement work. In this instance, EISG invited schools to bid for funding to support one or more of three priorities it had recognized: Safeguarding and Vulnerable/Distance Learning and thirdly, Headteacher Support.

The Trust is very grateful to Bedford Borough Council for agreeing to support the bid and to Mrs McMorn, who worked really hard to produce a first-class application. After half-term Mrs McMorn will start to plan how to move the project forward. The money will make a considerable difference to what we can do for learners at Kimberley and at Wootton as well as offering support to the Bedford Borough Schools in our local area.

EISG also agreed to support all schools in the Borough to the sum of £50,000 to enable them to lend digital equipment to families who do not have access to any at home, or very limited access, perhaps a smart phone or one device with multiple children needing to access it. Wootton Upper School's allocation of that funding – determined by the number of children eligible for Free School Meals is just above £950.

Mrs McMenamy, Mr Stewart and other staff are already meeting to work out how these resources can best be deployed.

As you know we have recently surveyed parents/carers and also all learners as to what access they have to digital equipment.

The Harpur Trust is helping schools to support families too

The Harpur Trust charity has set aside a very large level of funding to support needs that have become apparent as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. Over the last few weeks, it has been speaking to lots of different schools as to how they believe the Harpur Trust can best provide support. Following those discussions with schools The Harpur Trust plans to make available to schools reconditioned laptops and other digital equipment, which have been donated by members of the local community, including private individuals and businesses, to loan to those families in greatest need. This makes it even more important that all students, if they have not done so already, should complete the ICT survey put on Show My Homework by Mr Stewart and Mrs Genders on Monday 11th May. Before the machines are loaned, they will be checked by our Network Team to ensure no information is still on them from their previous owners and that the settings are appropriate for educational use.

Religious Festivals

This year, in the Christian calendar, Thursday May 21st is **Ascension Day**, the fortieth day of Easter, the day when Jesus Christ, ascended into heaven, leaving his apostles to evangelise the Christian faith. In any other year, many Christians would go to church on Ascension Day to celebrate this important festival; in some countries, Ascension Day remains a public holiday.

People of many different faiths are desperately missing the ability to visit their place of worship, whether it is a chapel or church, mosque, synagogue, temple or other building. Whilst accessing services and prayers on-line is possible and is the best alternative at the moment, the disconnect seems even greater when important religious festivals are being marked.

Muslims have been marking the holy month of Ramadan for the last few weeks; Ramadan ends on the date the new moon is sighted. This is expected to be on Sunday May 24th. When this happens, the important festival of Eid ul-Fitr, also called Eid al-Fitr, Id ul-Fitr, or simply Eid, marks the end of the month-long Ramadan fast. Muslims all across the UK ordinarily would enjoy lavish meals and celebrate together with family and friends. Clearly, this year will be a very different Eid for all Muslims.

I would like to wish all the Muslim families in the Wootton Academy Trust community a very happy Eid and once again commend Wootton Upper School pupils and Kimberley College students, as well as parents/carers and their other family members, and of course Wootton Academy Trust staff for the strength they have shown in maintaining the strict day-light fast during Ramadan.



Eid Mubarak [*Happy Eid!*]

Trust Improvement Plan: potential future priorities – parent/carer views

Mr Stewart has now produced the survey mentioned in an earlier newsletter inviting parents/carers to rank what they believe could be key Trust improvement priorities for the forthcoming year. Members of staff have already started to complete their own survey and it will be interesting to learn whether different stakeholder groups agree on our most important areas of work in the year ahead. Attached is a link for you to complete the survey. It should not take more than a few minutes to complete. Thank you. The link for the survey is: <https://bit.ly/3bPyrT5>

Good news

Many congratulations to Mrs and Mr Williamson on the birth of a baby daughter, who has been called Rose. Rose arrived safely last week. We are all delighted to learn the news. We know that all Wootton and Kimberley learners will be pleased to learn this news, as of course, the staff will be too! Congratulations.

Yours sincerely

Michael Gleeson
Executive Principal
Wootton Academy Trust

Wootton Academy Trust operates:
Wootton Upper School & Arts College
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