



Blackfen School for Girls

Raising aspirations - releasing potential

Headteacher Matthew Brown BA(Hons) DMS(Ed)

Blackfen School for Girls,
Blackfen Road,
Sidcup, Kent.
DA15 9NU

T: 020 8303 1887

F: 020 8298 1656

E: admin@blackfen.bexley.sch.uk
www.blackfenschoolforgirls.co.uk

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Summer term learning at home

Dear Parents and Carers,

The purpose of this letter is to pass on the thanks of the leaders and teachers at Blackfen School to our parent and carer community, for the continuing work to guide children's learning at home. The input of our parents and carers to enable students to adjust to a new way of life, as well as to a completely unexpected form of education is invaluable. At the start of a new term, in extraordinary circumstances, it is a good time to affirm the routines of home learning that are reasonable and feasible for parents, carers and students.

The transition from classroom to home learning has been a tough experience for staff, as much as it has been for our families. We know that completing subject tasks, independently and at home, is a small element within the full process of teaching. It is utterly frustrating for teachers to set work that is not in the desired style of "learning" that they want their students to experience. Many teachers are using Microsoft Teams, the school's virtual learning platform, to set subject tasks or to hold virtual 'conversations' with their students about their work. It is not an ideal learning environment for all subjects but it enables communication between students and teachers to continue and this element is vital to the learning process. We believe our teaching staff know best in terms of choosing the most appropriate format for setting work, as well as the level of challenge and style of response.

We are also considering the impact of school closure on our curriculum and taking advice from a range of professional bodies as to the shape and nature of learning and teaching when schools re-open. Leaders and teachers are working together to monitor the delivery of every subject's curriculum, during this term. We envisage adjusting our curriculum planning in the short-term, as well as in the new academic year and are preparing to take these important decisions with as much information, as possible.

In his speech at last week's Government Coronavirus briefing, the Secretary of State for Education, Gavin Williamson, spoke directly to students: *"And to any young people watching, I wanted to say to you how sorry I am that you have had your education disrupted in this way. I know how hard it must be and I would like to thank you for making the adjustments you have had to make. I know you will be missing your friends, your teachers and your lessons. I want you to know that you are an important part of this fight too and I cannot thank you enough for all that you are doing"*.



His words of thanks must also apply to students' families. We know from your letters and email some of the strain and pressure that parents and carers are facing, as they help children to make these significant adjustments. Please stay in touch, via our email address and we will do our best to advise and support you. Tiffnie Harris, whose blog for "Parentkind" has been quoted frequently, makes the point that parents and carers are "supporting learning" – *not* - home schooling. We know that Blackfen families never expected to be providing childcare and education to their teenage children in a 'locked-down' environment! We recognise the impossibility of trying to work from home, with one PC and a number of children clamouring to use it, at the same time as adults. The day at home does not run like the day in school, so don't hesitate to set up the routines that support your family life.

Planning for shorter, flexible days eases the pressure on both children and adults. We have encouraged students to structure their day in three sessions: 1) School study; 2) Family support and 3) Chill time. These sessions help children to fit into home life, rather than dominate it. Teachers appreciate home routines that help children learn how to manage their time in unselfish ways. A joint review of work in "Teams" by parents and children first thing in the morning, can lead to a joint agreement about the schedule of schoolwork to be tackled, so that it suits other activities in the home. Parents can agree regular slots when work can be reviewed and shared for comment but set up the expectation that there will be set times of undisturbed focus on a subject task.

Supporting children's learning is very important but parents are rightly concerned about their children's mental health and wellbeing, as well as their education. If the work routine isn't working, then change it and encourage your child to use Teams to tell their teachers when they are struggling. In lessons, students rarely work for 60 minutes, in isolation and silence, without a break. Mini breaks are essential and, as teachers and parents, we know that time 'off-line' is good for children. It might include 'Family time' or 'Chill time' or other mini breaks like walking the dog; reading books and magazines; listening to an audiobook or walking to local shops. Joe Wicks' PE session in the morning offers children 30 – 40 minutes of physical exercise that underpins good mental health and also allows other people in the home access to the PC.

Thank you for your patience as we continue to adapt learning to make it effective for these times. We appreciate your communication: every email and letter is read by a senior leader and actioned. Please tell us, via our admin email or by telephone call, where we need to support you, as you support us and your child learning at home.

Yours sincerely,



Miss F Minnis
Deputy Headteacher

