



Blackfen School for Girls

Raising aspirations - releasing potential

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Remote Teaching and Learning update: (2)

Dear Parents and Carers in Key Stage 4,

He got it right: *“And I’m particularly in awe of the way the parents, carers and guardians of children have risen to the unique challenges with which you have been faced”*.

(Boris Johnson, Prime Minister, 29.1.21, in an open letter to parents)

The ‘unique challenges’ of home learning are not always resolved by laptops, parenting websites or even face-to-face video lessons. On some days, as parents and teachers, getting home learning ‘right’ is better described as giving it our ‘best’ at this moment and preparing to do better, next time. After spending an afternoon answering your enquiries, I found myself listening to a parent who said about his daughter, “She just needs to be back in school”. How true. Home is not school.

Likewise, I also had a long conversation last week with an experienced colleague who is trying to teach ‘as normal’ on “Microsoft Teams”. We agreed that remote teaching presents its own ‘unique challenges’ because there isn’t a single device or digital platform or on-line program to replicate the teacher’s work in a classroom. ‘Teams’ does not feel ‘right’.

As leaders, we continue to follow advice on running the school remotely from a number of educational organisations, including the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). You may have noted the appointment last week of one of their ex-Directors, Sir Kevan Collins, as the government’s ‘Education recovery commissioner’. The EEF’s solid and reliable educational research is a tonic for frenzied media reporting, which can feel overwhelming. Please take time to read Appendix A: ‘Expectations of parents and carers’ in our Remote Learning Policy because it’s the part of home learning that we ask Key Stage 4 parents and carers to steer and it contains the EEF’s sensible and practical suggestions for dealing with the ‘unique challenges’ you face at home.

So – after half a term of remote learning, where do we go from here?

- Firstly, take a break during the February half term week. Remote learning is an intensive experience for students and it intrudes on the way that the whole household functions.
- Secondly, take time out with your daughter to review what has worked well at home and what needs to change, after the half term break, in order to improve home learning. School leaders are doing a similar exercise, this week.
- Thirdly, take control of the ‘known knowns’. In 2002, it was the then US Secretary of State for Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, who coined the phrase about the ‘known knowns’; the ‘known unknowns’ and the ‘unknown unknowns’! Parents and carers are in charge of the ‘known knowns’ at home. The school asks Key Stage 4 parents and carers to support home *learning* by managing the home context because it is the job that you know best. We do not ask our parents to deliver home *schooling*: that is the job that teachers know best.
- Fourthly, take charge of Microsoft Teams. Ask your daughter to show you her version of ‘Teams’. Look inside the different subject folders; check the assignments set and note completion deadlines.

Some elements of learning, such as group work, cannot be reproduced easily by Microsoft Teams and are much missed by teachers and students, alike. The EEF has reported how peer discussion



motivates students, as well as deepens their understanding of subject knowledge. Teachers plan group work and peer discussion as an integral element of effective teaching. As we have all discovered, lonely learning does little to motivate students of any age.

So parents and carers' discussions with students at home are valued and much appreciated by teachers and are essential to students continuing to make good progress: parents and students scheduling lessons and breaks, together, at the beginning of the day and reviewing learning at the end of the day cannot be overrated. Testing memorisation of lesson content and asking questions about notes and tasks in exercise books keeps students' memorisation skills and mental processing sharp and clear. Daily conversations also maintain your child's mental and emotional good health, as the *Young Minds* charity recommended, when they launched their *#Take 20* initiative in 2017. Their website has been updated to help parents and teens keep talking during the pandemic and the tab labelled '*20 activities for 20 minutes*' is especially helpful: <https://youngminds.org.uk/starting-a-conversation-with-your-child/>.

Of course, there are actions to be taken by Key Stage 4 students, themselves. We expect all students to be dressed and ready to learn by 8.30 am. You may wish to review Appendix B: 'Expectations of students' in our Remote Learning Policy, with your daughter, which lets her see the particular responsibilities she is allocated during school closure.

Their teachers know that the lead-up to starting Key Stage 4 was interrupted for Year 10 students by the first national lockdown in March/April 2020. So, it is particularly important that students now continue developing effective Key Stage 4 study habits. They must complete *every* task in *every* subject, to their best level of achievement. This term's learning is the platform which holds Summer term knowledge, understanding and skills, and it will be tested in school, so learning must be thorough and work set must be finished in full. Year 10 students should keep to the times of the school day, in order to return to the demands and standards of on-site learning without delay.

Likewise, Year 11 students should adopt the same disciplined mind-set and study habits in every subject, in order to be prepared for teacher-assessment of their GCSE and BTEC work in the Summer term. Teachers have been directed to set their usual Spring term tasks and assessments, so students should aim to complete every piece of work to the best of their ability. They should also take care to ensure that their work is entirely their own and is not copied from educational or subject-specific websites, as this would damage the teacher-assessment process when it begins in school.

The Contact names and emails listed in the Remote Learning Policy Appendices also let you know that Blackfen School is still open *remotely*. We are still here for you and working with you as leaders, teachers and support staff. The 'unique challenges' of remote education are finally being recognised and discussed more openly and we thank parents and carers for their support, thus far. Please do not hesitate to request our support in return and, although we may not always get it 'right', first time, we will continue to strive to do our best for you.

Yours sincerely,



Miss F Minnis
Deputy Headteacher

