



Blackfen School for Girls

Raising aspirations - releasing potential

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Dear Blackfen student,

We are finally (nearly) at the end of January and we enter the last 2 weeks before half term. January, it always seems to be one of the toughest months of the year to get through and this year has been particularly tough for everyone. However, by taking each day as it comes, by dividing that day into manageable chunks and by focusing on the present rather than the past or the future, we have managed to keep going. We can do no more at this stage.

I want to start by saying we are all missing you very much. We see you, we hear you, we listen to you, we read your work, but nothing can quite replace face-to-face contact and engagement with you. It is a very quiet place without you. You are all doing really well with your work and you must maintain your work and engagement even on those days when you really don't feel like it. I know there are days when it is difficult, when you are sharing equipment, when you are having to do other things and when you just find it all too much. I also know that many of you have been ill with Covid-19 and many of you are still ill. I send my best wishes to you at this time for a speedy recovery. Keep talking and keep asking questions and telling us what your situation is. If we don't know, we cannot help you.

On Wednesday 3 February, the day is being given over to a mental well-being day for the school community. There are lots of things for you to do on this day and all this information is provided for you. It is a chance to really focus on yourself and your own mental well-being. I hope that you have a good day.

As part of supporting my own mental well-being, I download the Action for Happiness calendar each month. This has a daily action on it – often a thinking action. On Monday 25 January it was, “Decide to lift people up rather than put them down.” I had to read this several times before I realised what it was all about. Of course, it is always much more difficult to lift something than to put it down but this is the point. You have to make the effort to lift someone up, and even more of an effort to lift yourself up. The mental well-being day gives us a chance to do this. I wonder how many times in the last year we have seen someone do something and we have “put them down.” Now, compare this with the number of times you have supported someone or given words of encouragement to help them through a tough time. In the words of Maya Angelou,

“If I could give you one thought, it would be to lift someone up. Lift a stranger up--lift her up. I would ask you, mother and father, brother and sister, lovers, mother and daughter, father and son, lift someone. The very idea of lifting someone up will lift you, as well.”

The future

When will schools be open again for all young people and staff?

This is a question which has been asked and repeated many times over the last few weeks. The simple answer from me is that I don't know. I know what the present situation is and I know that the long term plan is for us all to be together as one community but I have no idea on the time scale for this. Try not to despair, keep engaging with your remote learning and keep asking for help if you are unsure about anything. As humans, we all like certainty. The nature of the Covid-19 virus is that there is no certainty. Scientists can model what they think will happen and we can all speculate. We will know when the time is right for young people to start to return to school and that clearly is not at the present time.



What about those students due to do external examinations this year?

There is a national consultation taking place on this and we hope that, by the end of February, we will have some clear information to provide about how young people will be assessed in the summer. The consultation closes on Friday 29 January. If you would like to make your views known, please click on this link and then respond on line to complete the consultation.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021>

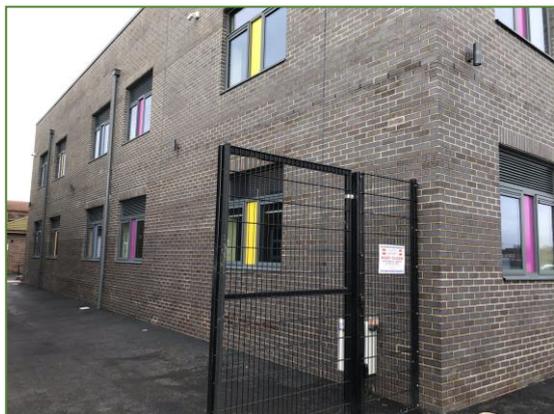
So, what is happening in school?

Most staff are working remotely and are providing the on-line lessons and support for you. Some staff, such as the site staff, members of the office staff and cleaning staff, are in school every day. A student support officer is on site every day. If at any point you get a chance, thank a member of staff for their work in supporting you and supporting the school.

Everyone in school is tested once a week using the lateral flow testing devices which were provided for schools. We have a team of trained test assistants and processors doing this work. I attach some photos so that you can see what our testing station looks like.



The buildings remain largely empty, cold and desolate and the canteen is closed. The new building has now officially been handed over to the school (see photos attached).



We are now starting work on the demolition of X and Y and Lab 51. These will be gone by the end of the half term break. Amazingly, these were both put up as temporary buildings. We believe that both of these buildings have been standing for over 30 years. X and Y, in particular, have had various different uses over the last 15 years. From student welfare area, BTEC PE, PPE, SEND area, textiles and Childcare. The walls in there have been put up, taken down, put up and taken down again. For a time, they also housed a resident on-site police officer. The end of an era but replaced by something much better.

What can I do?

The most important thing to do is to look after yourself and those around you. There have been grim figures reported this week in the news of the number of deaths from Covid-19 in the UK. You all need to continue to play a part during this lockdown to help to bring the level of transmission under control.

And finally....

Keep going, focus on what you can control and try not to worry about what you cannot control (easier said than done). Support each other and try to lift up one other person every single day. This will certainly lift you up.

With my best wishes to you and to your family.

Yours sincerely,

Matthew F W Brown

Matthew Brown
Head Teacher

