



Southend High School for Girls

An Academy Grammar School

Southchurch Boulevard, Southend-on-Sea, SS2 4UZ

Headteacher: Mr J Carey MEd (Cantab), BA (Hons), LLE, NPQEL

24th April 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Students,

I hope that you are well.

We are now at the end of the first week back after the holidays and have been informed by the government that lockdown will most likely continue for two to three more weeks at the very least. My team of staff at SHSG and I have been planning for the new challenges that an extended time away from school could bring. I set out these challenges and our plans below.

Academic progress and wellbeing: getting the balance right

Leading up to Easter, we quite rightly emphasised wellbeing; the lockdown came without much warning and thrust us into unusual territory. Wellbeing still needs to be our priority; we want students and staff, not to mention parents, to return to school physically and emotionally healthy. As I said in previous communications, students should not spend all day in front of a computer; we all need to be realistic about what can be achieved and not try to replicate a typical school day at home.

That said, it is essential as we move into week four of learning at home that students are making progress through the curriculum, stimulated and challenged academically, and achieve a sense of accomplishment in their studies. We have also planned some challenging activities for our new Year 7s to complete, ready for their first day in September!

Exams, assessments and reports (not including Year 11 and 13)

Over the Easter break, we spent time looking at our examination calendar and adjusted this in light of the lockdown situation. Examinations need to be in timed, controlled conditions where every student has the same experience. This is not manageable at home, and we are not asking you to become invigilators as well as busy parents. We do, however, want students to complete assessments that can be marked and assessed. Some of this may be the projects they are already working on. This is an essential part of adding value to the learning completed, as well as giving the teachers valuable information about students' progress and next steps. We will email this information along with the reporting schedule.

Exams, assessments and reports (Year 11 and 13)

I outlined in previous communication the government's plans for awarding grades to A-Level and GCSE students. We have a thorough process in place to ensure that all students will be awarded the grades that they need and deserve. Teachers will consider your child's targets, their estimated grades and teacher assessments over the two-year programme and any assessments and classwork as well. However, teachers will also place a high value on what they feel your child would have been able to achieve, working hard from the mock examinations through to the summer. We recognise that students peak at the time of the exam and not in December or January mocks. In short, we will ensure that students are awarded the best grade we can justify.

Any work set now for Year 11 and Year 13 is to keep them engaged in learning and stimulated academically, ready for their next chapter of A Level or Post-18. No work set now will be used to determine A level or GCSE grades.

Year 11 and Year 13 will receive reports; the dates and reports will be emailed.

Learning experiences

We have had some fantastic work sent to us from SHSG students. These include high-level responses to academic tasks, charity work related to COVID-19, and even family engagement with the challenges I set out in my Infogram in the Gazette.

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Your child should engage in a variety and range of learning experiences each day. Some subjects lend themselves to more extended deadlines and independent study.

This is an excellent opportunity to utilise the wealth of resources available online and for students to do this at their own pace. Other subjects need more frequent feedback and interaction between the teacher and the student. There certainly isn't a one-size-fits-all; indeed, we must not operate in that way. Different year groups, subjects, topics and preferred ways of working demand different approaches.

However, it is, of course, vital that students are being taught and not just completing tasks. Staff have been making SHSG video tutorials and podcasts, using Microsoft Teams and whole class or one-to-one email responding to student queries. I want to take this opportunity to thank the SHSG teachers for the superb work they have been doing in these challenging circumstances. We will be providing a Year Group Table showing topics, modes of delivery and deadlines for you to have all the information about subjects in one place.

We recognise that we won't get it right for every student every day. With over 1200 students, we are very conscious that not everyone will be coping with learning and studying at home; some may be struggling. That is why we have added two new methods of communicating with parents.

Communicating directly with parents

Firstly, I have asked form tutors to send a weekly, personal email to you, in addition to the email to your child, to check how your child is coping. Things change from week to week, and we want to be proactive and give you the reassurance that you will have an email sent every week touching base with you.

Secondly, we will be sending out a survey to achieve a sense of the emerging themes coming out of the virtual learning experience. This will help us to respond to school-wide issues.

We will, of course, continue to send out my weekly letter and Gazette.

International trips next term

In a regular school calendar, we have a wealth of trips and visits planned. Due to the current situation with COVID-19, I have decided to cancel all international excursions for at least the first half of the autumn term. The World Challenge organisers have also cancelled this programme and international visit.

Re-opening

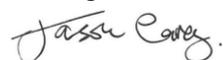
Nationally, there have been various messages and debates about when schools will re-open. Perhaps the most important thing to consider is that how we operate now will have a significant impact on us emotionally and physically for when we do eventually return. Please keep in contact with us and keep sending in the superb work you have been completing.

I summarise below the main actions addressed in this letter, reflecting our aims for the next stage of lockdown:

1. To continue prioritising wellbeing.
2. To ensure that students are making progress through the curriculum and remain engaged in varied, high-quality learning experiences.
3. To award the A level and GCSE grades that reflect the very best of what students need, deserve and are capable of achieving.
4. To provide a year-group overview of the topics taught in each subject.
5. To send a weekly email to parents to check-in on your child's wellbeing.
6. To issue an online survey to parents to establish emerging themes about virtual learning experience to date.

Keep safe.

Best regards,



Jason Carey

Headteacher

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