

Dear Parent/Carer

I wanted to write and express my thanks to you all for the role you have played in supporting your school over the most difficult weeks many of us have ever known. I am sure over recent weeks you have gone through a full range of emotions as a family and that has been replicated within many aspects of our school. The fear of the unknown, frustration of isolation and having to manage home learning have become a part of our lives that we never expected. Yet, having spoken to many of you I know that the increase in quality family time has given us an opportunity to re-evaluate our lives and consider what will be our priorities when this is all over.

As a Trust we decided to have a single line of communication through our CEO, Dr Gill Eatough but I wanted to write to you personally to give you an update on how your school has responded to the Covid pandemic. As you are aware, Ercall Wood, like many other schools has not been closed and we have been actively supporting the children of key workers and children classed as being vulnerable for various reasons. It has been an honour for us to work with our children who are going through such difficult times in their lives. Some of our students have not seen their parents, who are working on the front line NHS, for over 4 weeks and the fact that they can have a degree of normality by coming to school is so important to us all as a staff. I was so pleased that EWA students attended the Easter school at HLC where pupils from across the Trust came together during the holiday. It was brilliant to see all the students from different schools working together and most importantly, it allowed Key workers to carry on supporting the country.

Whilst accessing free school meals has been a national crisis, we have worked tirelessly to get food to our eligible families. Since we closed, free school meals were initially being delivered by the local authority, we then held collections at HLC for families who were not receiving a meal and now we battle on a daily basis with the Government software that is struggling to cope with demand to provide vouchers for local supermarkets. Please let us know if you are eligible for free school meals and not receiving vouchers as yesterday, we sent out our first food parcels to families to support them through this difficult time.

I think the most difficult aspect of school closure has been home learning. It has proven to be so stressful for the children having to negotiate work more independently, for staff trying to replicate the classroom setting in the home and without doubt the impact on you as parents, it has been challenging to say the least. I would like to be very clear about what our position is on home learning and it is simple; our priority is the welfare and mental health of your child and you all as a family. Under no circumstances should home learning result in anxiety for you or your child. You are a parent and not a teacher, we know that you are doing the best you can.

We have stated as a Trust that a minimum of 2 hours of work each day is acceptable and we know that for some students 2 hours is a maximum and for others it is nowhere near enough. Equally, we know that what some students find challenging, others may thrive on. The issue for us as teachers is that we cannot see the students, gauge reactions and see the rate of work. In addition, "Show my Homework" software does not provide us with the information we need to really personalise learning. What we are realising over time is the importance of verbal delivery from teachers which sounds an obvious thing to say but it is needed to bring the resources to life and enables teachers to understand the different challenges for different individuals. We will continue to set work as if students were at school, and again I need to stress, you are the parent and you control the amount of work to be



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completed based on what you see. There will be no detentions for incomplete work and no emails asking why work has not been completed, what you will get is an email asking if everything is ok and how can we help? Again, thank you for your support over recent weeks, we are still working hard and refining what we are doing and responding to feedback from you all.

So what next? We know that the Government is planning for schools to return at some point however we have not been given a date. Many ideas are being presented to school leaders about phased returns of year groups, morning and afternoon sessions, staggered start and end of days etc to enable social distancing. What I do know is that we will manage the return as carefully as we can, we know that it will be hard for many of our students to readjust to school life. In addition, I also must also consider staff safety alongside students. Our staff have been simply amazing, I would like to publicly thank all of them for the roles they have played during the crisis. They have put themselves and their families at risk to support our key worker lessons, whilst setting home learning and trying to manage their own families. They have been brilliant and so positive at all times.

Finally, I would like you to read this to your child. Speaking on behalf of all the staff at your school, I would like to say that we all miss you! We miss the energy you bring to our school, the smiles on your faces and all of your personalities..... we never thought we would ever say that!! We know how difficult home learning has been for you and we know you have tried your best. We have been coming into school every day and it just feels empty without you all..... Hopefully that will change soon and we will be able to teach and support you face to face. I have always known that the children are the heartbeat of any school and that is most definitely the case at Ercall Wood, we cannot wait to have you back.

In the meantime, please continue to follow the Government guidance on social distancing to keep yourselves and your families safe.

See you soon.

Yours sincerely



Paul Roberts
Executive Principal

