

Thursday 26th March 2020

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Dear Parents and Carers,

I just wanted to touch base with you all, and remind you that we are here at UKAT, to try and support you, and your children the best we can in this new 'remote' world that we are living in. I am sure many of you, and members of your family, may be feeling anxious and concerned with the everyday media updates on the progress of the Coronavirus. I am also sure we are all behind the government's advice to slow down the pace and progression of the virus by following their advice (which I reiterate below), so that were any of us to fall ill we would be assured of medical treatment.

The government as you know have advised everyone to stay at home if at all possible, and only go out for:

- Basic necessities / food, as infrequently as possible.
- To take one form of exercise a day (walk, run, cycle) alone, or with members of your household only.
- Medical needs or to provide care or help to a vulnerable person.
- Travelling to and from work - but only where this is essential, and cannot be done from home.

These measures have impacted on our working at UKAT. We have now reorganised our staff rotas so that staff have time working from home, rather than on the school site, thereby meeting the government's requirements. However, parents/carers and students can still contact staff by emailing them on their UKAT email address, from which they have been sending your child's learning materials. Can we remind you that teachers are available to contact via the UKAT email addresses between the times of 8.45am and 3.30pm, Monday to Friday.

As you know, although schools were closed for the majority of students from last Friday 20th March, there was a requirement for schools to remain open to care for: vulnerable students, students with Education Health and Care Plans, Looked after Children, and children of Key Workers. These requirements were to ensure that staff of the vital key services, like the NHS, the Police, the food industry, utilities etc. could be looked after, so their parents/carers could go to work and keep our country working and provide support for those battling the virus.

However, most parents/carers, deemed to be Key Workers, have chosen, after consideration of the risks, not to send their children in, demonstrating that they paid heed to the government's strong advice to keep their children at home, and only use the key worker provision as a last resort, thereby minimising their risk of contracting and potentially spreading the virus.

I know at this time across the country most people are feeling stressed, overwhelmed and under pressure by everything that's happening. This includes the work being sent home or digitally available work for your child. I just wanted to give you my perspective on this as some parents/carers and students have found this difficult.

A few points to note first:

- None of us, as teachers or parents/carers, would have necessarily chosen digital remote learning as the way to educate your children. However this is an unprecedented emergency situation impacting on the whole world. Learning in this way has brought with it issues from the school's perspective as well as for parents/carers. Please bear with us if the technology is not as robust as it should be – we have over 2000+ students across the Trust, accessing learning via our learning platform. We will try to sort out any issues as soon as we are alerted.
- Please do not worry if your child cannot do all that is being asked of them – indeed you might decide that it is productive for them to spend some time doing other activities such as: reading, playing in the garden, cooking, discussing and talking with family members, maybe some internet browsing (although would suggest wall to wall gaming probably isn't ideal for the many weeks ahead). All these are equally good things to do and provide learning opportunities.
- There is nothing to stress or feel guilty about – just do as much of the learning activities as you think appropriate... although of course we would encourage strongly our students in Years 11 and 13 to engage in the learning activities set.
- Please remember schools had no notice, no preparation time and were not told to 'continue to plan lessons as normal'. If some of the digital learning materials set this week are overwhelming then please provide feedback to us, and bear with us as we adjust our work on developing future learning materials. Please email your child's teachers with feedback.
- I absolutely recognise that it is not possible for parents/carers to fully supervise their child's digital work at home, particularly if you have other children, are caring for someone or are expected to work at home yourselves. Please do not worry.
- Some parents/carers have been worried about the amount of learning activities sent home with a rallying cry of 'how can we complete all this?'. Again please do not worry – just do what you can – it's not a competition or a race. Please, if your child completes work, get them to send it back by taking a photograph of it or scanning it, and emailing it back to their teacher. Teachers should be providing feedback on work sent to them.
- We will get through the months ahead - but again I understand maintaining momentum through digital learning, over many months and weeks, is difficult. We can only do the best we can. Remember your child will not fall behind. If young people could all learn new concepts without specific teaching, we wouldn't need teachers. They will cover all of this again, multiple times.

So what's the minimum expectation over the weeks ahead? For older students please try to encourage them to engage and keep up as best as they can with the work set for their GCSE and A level studies. For younger students I suggest:

- Doing as much of the English, Maths and Science activities set as they can.

- Try a bit of reading every day.
- Write something creative – a story, a poem, a speech – even a diary of their thoughts and feelings at this time.
- Some physical exercise everyday – try the Joe Wicks' video every day at 9.00am.
- Listen and play some music.
- Draw or make something.
- Independently work on a project – something they are interested in - great for keeping brains ticking over.
- Practise some Mindfulness if you have already been shown how to do this at school.

As a parent/carer you are loving your children and supporting them through a difficult time. Look after yourself as well. Many of your children will be very stressed by the media coverage and fearful for themselves, as well as for you. Minimising stress is absolutely vital in a time like this for balanced mental health and wellbeing.

For those students whose public examinations have been cancelled in May and June, I send my reassurances that we will be in touch with you as soon as possible. Government level discussions are ongoing with school leaders and we must wait for conclusions to be reached as to what schools are to be asked to do in recommending grades for students. It is highly likely schools will be asked to supply student work samples as evidence of grades they recommend for students. Clearly the more evidence we have of the standard of their work the better.

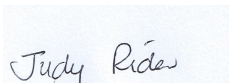
Please note that from Monday 6th April to Friday 17th April 2020 there will be no digital learning sent to students, as this is the Easter holiday. Digital learning and communications with teachers about learning will resume from Monday 20th April.

In conclusion you can only do the best you can – so please do not worry. I am sure we will all be back in our routines soon, and we will endeavour to make sure all your children are back on track with their learning, and feel emotionally safe and secure in the world beyond Covid 19.

I am attaching with this letter from me, another letter (written by two of my colleagues) for your children and would be grateful if you could pass it to them.

I wish you and your family good health, and a Happy Easter- albeit an 'at home' Easter break.

My very best wishes to you all.



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