

15th January 2021

Dear Parent/Carer,

I hope that you and your family have managed to keep well under these latest restrictions and in these most testing of recent weeks.

As we reach the end of the second week of the spring term, students and staff have now been working in our **Virtual** school for eight days. Student engagement has improved exponentially compared with the March lockdown. This is great news and I thank the children and their parents for launching themselves into this alternative form of education.

We do not underestimate the challenges that parents/carers and our students are currently facing at home and hope that you continue to communicate with us regarding any support that we may be able to source. You will find much information about possible support links in our re-launched **Southfields Spirit** newsletter which you can access via

<https://www.southfieldsacademy.com/attachments/download.asp?file=2691&type=pdf>

Virtual School – Remote teaching and learning

In this first fortnight of the spring term we have received much spontaneous, positive feedback from parents and students, but we recognise that there are numerous tweaks we still need to make to ensure an optimal provision. We will be surveying both students and parents in the coming weeks once the provision settles as these last eight days are not yet typical. The intention was always to kick off with as many live lessons as possible in order to secure engagement. At the same time we recognise that constant live lessons are not sustainable from the point of view of teaching and student learning on the receiving end. Following the research available, we will be aiming to achieve best practice of a mix of experiences, approximately 50% live lessons and 50% live registration to lesson, followed by set work with the teacher being available in the virtual classroom to help students.

We are mindful of ‘screen fatigue’ and would like to ensure that students and teachers have appropriate breaks from the screen regularly throughout the day. Students must look away from screens at least once every 20 minutes. We will be posting the next steps in guidance to students and parents once we complete our surveys.

Calendar events

- **Year 11 Parents’ evening** was scheduled for Thursday 21st January. This event is cancelled. Instead parents/carers will receive a report reflecting student mock grades, recent efforts, forecast grades and a reflection activity for Year 11 students. We will be holding a virtual parents’ evening for parents of Year 11 students, likely to be in the second half of this term. We will then cover any guidance on GCSE grading, which we are still awaiting, and will enable progression discussions for your child.
- **Year 13 Parents’ evening** is scheduled for Thursday 28th January. We intend to offer a virtual parents’ evening on that day. Details will be communicated nearer the time.
- **INSET Day Monday 1st February** – We will have training for staff on this day and hence virtual school lessons will be suspended for the day.
- **Year 9 Options Process & Parents’ Evening** – We have delayed the planned options activities for Year 9 students and parents. These were due to take place in January and February. Instead, they will take place between the February half-term and the Easter break. Again, details will be communicated nearer the time.

We will keep parents informed about events planned to take place after the half-term break.



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Academy**

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Examination classes

We have students across Years 11, 12, 13 and those in our International Group who were due to take examinations this summer. Following the announcement of the cancellation of these examinations last week we are still awaiting further guidance related to the system that will replace the examinations. We know that teachers will be asked to award grades based on our assessment of student knowledge and skills. It is vitally important that students engage and make every effort to learn throughout the period of remote teaching. All work accomplished in virtual school will contribute to teacher assessment.

As soon as we have further information from the DfE we will pass this on to students and parents.

Free School Meals

We have been waiting for details of the Free School Meals voucher scheme from the Department for Education and have now been told that these will be distributed starting next week. Parents of children who qualify for these will be notified and vouchers will be sent out fortnightly, as they were during the lockdown in March last year. You will receive a separate voucher for each of your children. Please ensure that we have your up to date email address as incorrect information will mean there will be a delay in vouchers being distributed.

Please be sure to pass on our praise to your child at the end of an on-line week of engagement in lessons; not forgetting the support that you provide to help with home schooling.

Have a restful and safe weekend.

Yours sincerely



Wanda Golinska
Headteacher