



1 May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

It has been some time since my last letter to you and I apologise in advance for the lengthy nature of this one. I hope that you are all managing to stay well and have managed to create some sort of 'new normal' within your homes at such unprecedented times.

There has been an overwhelming amount of care and correspondence across our Pastoral Teams to support student welfare. The Weekly Bulletins, Tutor emails and individual telephone calls in response to meeting individual needs have been well received. I would like to personally thank the Leadership Team, who have been instrumental in the setting up of the College's Edu-care Programme, whilst maintaining Year Group updates to support key developments such as the Centre assessed grading for our Year 11 and 13 students. The team acted swiftly to adjust College systems in order to establish a variety of learning programmes for over 2,000 students from home, and in such challenging circumstances. Unfortunately, it was during this period that I became ill with Covid19 symptoms and was advised to self-isolate. On this note, a sincere thank you to all the staff, students and parents for being so incredibly supportive, patient and remaining so positive which allowed my teams to prioritise accordingly.

In particular, thank you to those of you who have been communicating via the newly formed Year Team email addresses. This has enabled the Leadership Team to respond promptly to support individual requests and improve current provision for learning across subject areas as a result of the feedback received.

The following information provided in this letter will ensure that you continue to feel informed as we move into the next phase of lockdown (government update due on 7 May 2020) and potential developments to support a 'partial return' to College.

Everything I write in this letter needs to be viewed in the context of the challenging times in which we find ourselves and is subject to change with government or local recommendations.

## Home Learning update

The first few weeks of distance learning have certainly been a steep learning curve for all of us. Thank you for those of you who have given us feedback about your experiences of Home Learning. None of us have ever experienced anything quite like this before, and your comments have been very welcome and have enabled us to understand how we can accommodate the 'wider needs'.

Overall, the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. Many of you have told us that the work you have received has helped your children to learn, and has enabled you to create learning routines, as well as varied and enjoyable environments for your children. We know though, that sometimes the amount of work we have set has felt overwhelming and difficult to navigate due to the variety of platforms and tasks being used. Some families feel overloaded with many tasks that are demanding online working and this has placed added pressure on those families with siblings sharing devices and parents also working from home. In normal circumstances, our database would suggest that most of our students have access to the internet and electronic devices in the home. However, one of the patterns emerging across

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many schools is the demand that this has put on the availability of resources in the home and on parents' time. It is often difficult to help children work for extended periods of time in a Home Learning context at this extraordinary time. For as many families requesting the delivery of a set timetable for 'live' lessons, we have the same number requesting a variety of delivery methods and structures to the day to ease family pressures and to prevent students being in front of screens for too many hours each day.

Please be assured that we will continue to make the necessary developments and changes to the way we set distance learning tasks to take account of this feedback. We want to ensure that you have all of the resources you need to help you support your children, but we do not want anybody to feel overwhelmed or anxious about the work we are providing.

We encourage you all to read the **Weekly Menu Guides** and **Student Bulletins** that are being emailed out on a regular basis to parents, carers and students. They can also be found on the College website. Hopefully, this provides regular communication between College and home, updates from parental feedback and provides a little more structure and support to the weekly routines in the home.

I want to emphasise that the work we set is there to support you at home and that the last thing we want to do is increase pressure for you. Our students are having very different reactions to the pandemic and the lockdown. Some are keen to work, have a variety of resources and have easy access to online devices. Whilst others are finding home circumstances more challenging and finding it difficult to concentrate and require more support. Please keep us posted and the teaching and support staff at the College will continue to do their part around their own challenges of working from home and supporting the Edu-care Programme.

## Preparing for our Return to College

As soon as the Department for Education and the Local Authority release official notification to support the re-opening of schools, we will prioritise communication to all parents/carers and staff accordingly. The Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson has announced that schools should be planning for a 'partial opening' and over a period to enable 'social distancing' to be adhered to.

The Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson (29/4/20)

"Schools across England will be reopened in a "phased manner" to ensure pupils and teachers are kept safe from coronavirus, the education secretary has confirmed.

Gavin Williamson said there was no date yet for lifting school closures, which have been in place since the UK entered lockdown last month for all pupils except for the children of key workers.

Amid growing pressure on the government to begin easing restrictions, Mr Williamson said he expected pupils to return to school in stages".

We will continue to do our best to prioritise the safeguarding and wellbeing of all our students whilst providing the best provision for education (both on and off site) during this extraordinary period of uncertainty. We will make every effort to communicate with you in an efficient and timely fashion in order that you can prepare accordingly.

When we re-open we will work hard to ensure we review where all of the children are, and we will do everything that may be needed to help them catch-up on anything they have missed. In the meantime, we will continue to set work to support you at home with your children, and ask that you continue to send us feedback.

## **Summer Term – Calendared Events (including trips, visits, work experience and events that involve large gatherings).**

It seems highly unlikely that a number of planned events throughout the Summer Term will be able to go ahead due to a number of factors beyond our control, such as the guidance measures on 'social distancing'. We will continue to communicate on how we can best share key information as a result of cancelled events.

We are extremely disappointed that we have been unable to accommodate the **Year 9 and Year 10 Parents' Evenings** that were due to take place this term and will be making every effort to ensure that you and your child/children receive feedback from subject teachers to support the students' academic progress on completion of this year.

We are discussing how we can best plan to ensure all the outstanding accolades and successes from this academic year are given the recognition and celebratory status they deserve. This may also include how we conduct examination results days in August 2020 (pending government measures).

The likelihood is that Enrichment Week and Work Experience for Years 10 and 12 will be cancelled due to the restrictions that will be imposed on schools and businesses during this period. Once we obtain government guidance we will take the necessary steps to arrange adjustments to all ParentPay accounts and notify you on arrangements for refunds where appropriate as soon as possible. At the moment, we have suggested that NO further monies are paid for these trips. Please be patient – this is a huge undertaking (alongside all the other work the Finance team are doing). We would respectfully ask that you do not contact them directly at this time on such matters unless your concern is of an urgent nature. Mrs Reddy will be writing to all parents/carers as soon as we have further updates.

## **Good News**

I hope that you have seen our many 'Good News' stories that we are continuing to post on a weekly basis. We are using this platform alongside our Weekly Bulletins to celebrate the work and wider celebrations of our students during the lockdown period. We welcome your contributions. We are looking for examples of students working at home, learning new skills, contributing to their local communities or just enjoying 'lockdown life'. Please send your comments or photographs to <https://www.ivybridge.devon.sch.uk/form/?pid=2&form=98> and we look forward to sharing your learning adventures.

## **Edu-care at Ivybridge Community College**

Edu-care is a limited schooling provision that has been running since closure (including throughout the Easter and May half-term breaks). This has enabled students whose parents are Key Workers, and those most vulnerable and in need of support, an opportunity to access daily childcare. All teaching and support staff are rotated to support the running of Edu-care and we will continue to share some of the exciting activities and project work as part of our weekly updates.

## **Wellbeing**

There is a dedicated team of staff committed to ensuring all students are receiving regular wellbeing updates and support. The Year Teams' Pastoral Leaders, alongside Mrs Warne and Mrs Ryder, are leading across this area and welcome any students who want to get in touch about accessing additional support. Please see Student Bulletins for full details.

Mrs Reddy has also coordinated a fantastic 'Enrichment Programme', offering all students a variety of activities and opportunities to participate in. Try something new, share your experiences and take this time to experiment with new learning adventures.

On a final note, and as we commence the start of the Summer Term, I would like to take this opportunity to (virtually) welcome Mr Ray Hennessy, our newly appointed Deputy Principal. Mr Hennessy joins a thriving team and brings a wealth of expertise as an experienced senior leader having worked in several secondary schools, as well as Lead Physical Education Consultant as part of the Local Authority School Effectiveness Team. Most recently, Mr Hennessy has been successfully appointed as an Inspector for Her Majesty's Inspectors for Schools (Ofsted) and this will be a great asset to support our own College Improvement journey.

Once again, I apologise for the length of this letter but hope that it gives you reassurance of our current priorities and the systems we continue to develop and put in place. The entire College Community are working together in these difficult circumstances and I am extremely proud to be part of the Ivybridge family.

Please stay safe, look after each other and keep in touch.

Yours sincerely

Rachel Hutchinson  
**College Principal**