Dear parents/carers/pupils

We hope that all families have stayed well and safe over the past few weeks. We also hope you have been able to access the home learning materials, and that these have been useful and accessible. In these exceptional times, we have been so impressed by the acts of kindness that many of our young people have devoted their energy to over the past few weeks. This has included painting rainbows to show support for NHS workers, shopping for others, finding ways to reach out to those who may be suffering from loneliness, persevering to support older generations through letters and stories, and adorning their front doors and wheelie bins with rainbows and messages of support.

If you have not already done so, please have a look at the Bryntirion Comprehensive twitter messages; you do not have to have a twitter account to see the messages. The emphasis has been on trying to remain positive and connected with each other and I hope some of the messages make you smile, especially the fabulous videos put together. We have had so many complimentary comments about all the incredible work staff are doing from parents and members of the community and, in such uncertain and anxious times, this is so important to us.

A return to school?

Whilst there is no definitive end in sight to the lockdown, I am sure you will be aware of the increased speculation on the easing of restrictions and the possible reopening of schools as an early measure. At this point, and until we have clarity, it would be unwise to undertake any pre-emptive planning for reopening. However, I do think it is wise to prepare ourselves mentally for an earlier than anticipated return to school for some pupils or groups, perhaps later on this summer term. It may, however, still be the case that we have to wait for September. At present, all we know is that there will be a review of the situation on May 7th. We are very much looking forward to a time when we can invite pupils back to school when, of course, it is safe to do so. Once we receive relevant information from Welsh Government, we will assess this with the local authority, and appropriate notice will be given to parents and pupils to ensure the confidence of everyone.

Life in the Maes-yr-Haul Hub

The Maes-yr-Haul hub is now well established, and the routines in place have enabled it to function well. Bryntirion staff have been attending to look after the children of key workers. There are very strict government guidelines now in place to secure necessary safeguarding and social distancing. The guidance from Welsh government is unchanged in that children should only attend where they cannot safely be looked after at home.
Free School Meal Distribution

As you may be aware, school has been open to prepare and distribute meals for families eligible for free school meals, and this continued over the Easter break. Staff volunteers have been very much a key part of this process and have made a major contribution. However, the Local Authority is planning to move to a different system from April 28th. Instead of receiving a cold sandwich and bottle of water, pupils eligible for free meals will receive a five day hamper instead. This would include fresh, canned and frozen food.

Qualifications and grades

The decision to cancel this year’s summer examination series has led to attempts by regulators to secure processes for the award of qualifications for learners in years 10 to 13. All significant communications by Qualifications Wales have now been shared with pupils and parents. Department teams have already started to make the arrangements to make the necessary judgements required. Pupils, parents and carers will want to know that the process of generating centre assessment grades is rigorous, objective and fair. A message for students and parents/carers has been published.

https://www.qualificationswales.org/english/publications/grades-a-message-to-learners/

We are not allowed, under any circumstances, to share the centre assessment grades nor the rank order of pupils with pupils, or parents/carers or any other individuals outside the school, before final results have been issued. This is to protect the integrity of teachers’ judgements, and to avoid teachers, heads of department, and senior leaders being put under pressure by pupils and parent to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence. Since the final grades for some or all pupils could be different from those submitted, it also helps to manage expectations.

The outcomes of pupils’ performance will be made available on the planned days in August (August 13th for A Level results and August 20th for GCSE results). If school is open, we will welcome pupils into school to receive their results; if not, we will make other arrangements as advised by the exams regulator.

Home (Distance/Online) Learning

We will be expecting pupils to follow the protocols for online learning shared before the school closure. A huge amount of work has been undertaken by heads of department and teachers in building the various TEAMs homeworking plans over the past few weeks. From the research available it would seem reasonable to expect most pupils to complete 2-3 hours of home learning per day during any period of extended closure. It is also clear that some pupils have found the sheer amount of work difficult to manage. We will be providing some further guidance this week which will, we believe, help to provide more structure and manageability. If you have any queries about homeworking, please contact school and we will endeavour to help you.
Online Safety

There has been a great deal of information released over recent weeks regarding internet safety and we are all having to make huge adjustments in terms of working, learning and staying connected with our friends, families, colleagues and communities. At the end of this first week back after Easter, we thought it might be a good time to revisit the core health and wellbeing messages related to online safety that we promote at Bryntirion, all of which tie-in with the Bryntirion Way: Be ready. Be respectful. Be safe.

Bryntirion learners have had the opportunity this year to consider:

- The impact on posture of extended use of mobile devices and computers.
- Key messages about the making, sending, requesting and sharing of sexual images which is illegal for anyone under the age of 18.
- The importance of communicating with parents, carers or any other trusted safe adult (including teachers) if they encounter any content that causes upset or distress.
- How important it is to take regular breaks from school work and the virtual world to include making the most outdoor exercise (and this lovely weather!) with an activity that they really enjoy, catching up with friends and family (using technology for now) and enjoying practical hobbies such as making and/or listening to music, journaling, art work, reading etc.
- Messages regarding the law and online hate crimes which formed the basis of an assembly with Mr Allinson, PCSO Jack Harris and Dr Preece after February half term. The THINK rule can be a useful test before posting or messaging:

  It is True?
  Is it Helpful?
  Is it Interesting?
  Is it Necessary?
  Is it Kind?

National organisation The Child Exploitation and Online Protection Command (CEOP) has produced some useful guidance and activities which can be accessed here: https://tinyurl.com/Home-Safety and which will be updated on a fortnightly basis.

You may find that previous family rules regarding screen-time have had to be adjusted or new apps and games have been introduced into your household without you having the time to carry out the necessary research that you might usually have. The following websites offer useful advice but please do get in touch if you have any specific questions that you would like answered or any suggestions for topics that you feel have not been covered here at tamasine.preece@bridgend.gov.uk
https://www.net-aware.org.uk/ (offers a quick check tool for social media, apps and games)

www.internetmatters.org
www.childnet.com
www.nspcc.org.uk
www.wisekids.org.uk

And finally

We are continuing to prepare for a return to normality. This includes preparing the timetable for September, finalising staffing arrangements, organising the school calendar and generally just making plans for a positive future. We do this with hope, optimism and ambition for our pupils and our community.

We are so much looking forward to the time when we can be reunited. In the meantime, take care and best wishes.

Kind regards

RK Pawar