

5th February 2021

Dear Students and Families

It is heartening news to hear that we have vaccines and that the roll out of these vaccines is well underway. It will take time to vaccinate enough of the population of our country to ensure we are all safe to return to some form of normality, but we can at least see a time when it will be safe again to visit loved ones and socialise with friends.

At the moment there appears to be no timeline for the reopening of secondary schools, and I know that the impact of missing school is hard on both the learning and wellbeing of our children. However, I want to say a few words about our students' families and the staff of Ysgol Treffynnon. Most parents are not set up to work from home, nor to look after their children at home without the significant support provided by grandparents and other key relatives. The restriction on travel and socialising is leaving many of our parents, carers, and guardians, as well as our teacher and support staff parents, struggling to juggle work with running a home and supporting the learning and wellbeing needs of their children.

We have received many comments from families sharing the challenges they are facing managing the demands of work and the demands of parenting; especially in supporting their children to engage with their learning. These challenges reflect the challenges being experienced by the staff of Ysgol Treffynnon. Many of our teachers are having to deliver lessons from home while looking after their own children and trying to find time to support their children with their online learning. Many of our support staff parents are having to share time off work so that they can supervise their own children at home and attend school to supervise the children of our keyworker families and our vulnerable children. There are also those members of staff who must attend work every day, despite their own fears, if the school is to remain open and safe for those children of keyworkers or children with significant vulnerabilities.

I want to offer a huge thank you to the staff of our school for the incredible work they are doing under incredibly stressful times. Learning to teach and support students online is not something any teacher in the UK was trained to do and I think they are doing a magnificent job. I also want to offer a massive thank you to the parents, carers, and guardians of our students. I know it is tough having your children at home and supporting them with their learning, I have 3 children at home myself. Please know that what you are doing is not only worth the stress, it is actually working! We have seen an incredibly high level of engagement from our students. Most of our students are engaging regularly in their online lessons and completing and submitting work.

Online learning can never replace classroom lessons, online schooling can never replace the social interaction that is possible by being together, and online schooling can never hope to support the individual wellbeing challenges many children, families and school staff are facing... Together we are making a huge positive difference to the future of our children and in working together we are supporting each other to manage the stresses and anxieties that I think may be the true definition of this pandemic in the years to come.

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Our pastoral support team are making over 500 calls a week to families to offer support, or just a chance to share frustrations and concerns. Our teachers are delivering over 600 lessons per week, each lesson requiring considerably more planning time than normal due to the need for videos, presentations, and voice overs to replace teachers' instructions and support in class. Our support staff are supervising over 40 key worker and vulnerable students in 3 separate bubbles, while supporting them to engage with their online learning.

When our staff call home, parents, carers, and guardians are supportive, polite, and caring, playing their critical role in ensuring their children engage meaningfully in their learning. This country has never experienced anything like this since WW2, but once again people are rising to the challenge and showing that as a community, we are strong and caring and that we will not be beaten by some insidious unseen enemy.

Feedback from families and students suggest there are many students struggling to complete the quantity of work online, especially those in examination years. We are therefore going to have two '**Catch Up Days**' next week on **Thursday 11th February 2021** and **Friday 12th February 2021** for students to catch up on their learning. Teachers will not plan or provide any new learning on those days, but they will be available to offer support if needed. I know that there is a half-term holiday the week after, but no one should be working during that holiday. Everyone has a chance to rest and recharge and that includes our Year 11 students and I want to ensure they take that opportunity. After half-term there will be plenty for them to be doing to generate the evidence needed for their 'Centre Determined Grades' to be awarded.

I will end this rather long letter by offering once again, my thanks to all our students, their parents, carers, or guardians and to our all staff. What you have all managed to achieve over this last half-term is magnificent. I hope that by the summer we may be open again, but until then, stay strong, stay safe and try to keep smiling 😊.

Yours sincerely



John Weir
Head Teacher

