



Thursday 30th April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Headteacher's Update

I'm afraid that it's a longer than normal update this week, however, there are a few significant topics to be covered.

In this update:

- Year 8 Options
- Remote Learning for Year 11
- Communication
- Farewell to Mrs Blyth
- Celebrating Success

Year 8 Options

There has been much national debate across the educational sector in recent years about the merits of starting GCSEs earlier (in Year 9) as we have done for many years. There is much research on the matter and although the Department for Education and Ofsted are both clear that schools are free to make their own curriculum choices, it is incumbent on schools to demonstrate that we are keeping our curriculum as wide as possible to give students a broad and deep learning experience as a firm foundation to support GCSE learning. For further context on this topic, an interesting article from January can be read here:

<https://tinyurl.com/ofstedblogpost>

As a Leadership Team, we had taken the view that it was likely we would revert to GCSEs being started in Year 10, potentially introducing this change for the current Year 7. With the thought and planning that we had already given to introducing this change for September 2021 (i.e. the current Year 7) we feel well equipped to bring implementation forward to September 2020 (i.e. the current Year 8). We will therefore delay the options process for the current Year 8 until Spring Term of their Year 9, when students will then make their options choices for the start of Year 10 (in September 2021).

We have taken the decision to implement the change now for strong reasons:

1. Even with the strong efforts being made by students, parents and staff, the reality is that Year 8 will have had a greatly diminished KS3 experience as a result of the lockdown and will have many varied gaps as a result. Extending KS3 into Year 9 will give greater opportunity to remedy any lasting implications of this situation.
2. It remains unclear for how long school attendance will continue to be interrupted, so this reduces the possibility that the start of GCSE courses will be disrupted.



3. Students have not been through the options process and while we could do the process remotely, I cannot say hand on heart that we would be able to replicate the level of support and guidance that students would normally receive.

Students in the current Year 8 will therefore continue to experience the broader KS3 curriculum when they are in Year 9 from September. The timetable will consist of the following 13 subjects (with the number of periods per fortnight for each indicated):

English	7	Art	2	Geography	3
Maths	7	Computing	3	History	3
Science	9	D&T	2	Music	2
		Drama	2	PE	5
		French	3	RS	2

I firmly believe that the return to a 3-year KS3 will give our students a broader and richer KS3 experience. It will allow students to have deeper contextual knowledge to bring to their GCSE studies and enable them to make more informed options decisions in Year 9.

I recognise that this is a significant change to the structure of the curriculum but I do believe there are very strong educational reasons that underpin the decision as well as equally strong practical reasons for implementing these changes now in response to the disruption caused by COVID-19. Most sincerely, we are implementing this now as we believe it presents the best opportunity for our students to learn and progress successfully. We have tried to balance the need to act swiftly with the responsibility to ensure that we can implement this change effectively and I do not underestimate the impact that this decision may have on some students who were already looking forward to embarking on their GCSE courses this coming September. I am sorry for any upset that this causes. These are truly exceptional circumstances that require us all to adapt. If you are concerned about the wellbeing of your child in general, or specifically in response to this news, please do not hesitate to contact Mr Baker so that we can support you and your child.

Remote Learning for Year 11

We are now in a position to provide meaningful learning for Year 11 students. We wanted to ensure that any work we provided would prove useful for the next stage of education for our students and therefore we will have three levels of provision:

- English, Maths and Science skills and practice work is being added to the Year 11 SharePoint page. This work will be useful for any student who wants to maintain their knowledge in these subjects and may be particularly relevant for any student who thinks that they may need to participate in the English, Maths or Science exams that the Government has proposed for the Autumn Term. We do not have specific details yet but it appears that students will have a chance to sit exams in these subjects in the autumn if they are unhappy with the grade they are awarded in the summer or if they need to resit because the grade was lower than required for progression to Sixth Form or college. More details about these exams will be shared with you as they are published.



- We will also be adding A-level preparation work to the Year 11 SharePoint. This work is largely based on PiXL Gateway and PiXL Independence programmes and should give interested students lots of opportunities to prepare independently for their future studies.
- Over the coming weeks we will then enhance this provision with Emmbrook specific resources for our prospective A-level students. These resources will be tailored to the needs of our courses' specifications. This provision will be added to the Year 12 SharePoint and we will inform you when it is ready to be accessed.

Year 11 parents will shortly be hearing from Miss Cairns directly with more detailed information about this new provision.

Communication

I can reveal that this will be my last weekly update letter. From next week we aim to improve our communications by releasing a weekly newsletter; I will contribute to each edition so that you stay informed of current and future school developments.

One change for September is that we will not be issuing new planners to students. We have found that planners have had less and less use in recent years (particularly since the introduction of Show My Homework) and we are confident that effective communication can be maintained using IT. There may be some students who personally make good use of a physical planner to organise themselves and I hope that by communicating this now it will give you time to think as a family about how best to manage this change; students would be welcome to bring their own diary/planner, for example. If you think this has the potential to cause your child difficulties with organisation please do contact their Year Leader to talk through possible solutions.

Farewell to Mrs Blyth

Today we say goodbye to Mrs Blyth, who has been with us for three years in the dual capacity as a teacher of English and a senior pastoral leader. Mrs Blyth has a sincere and deep care for children and this is reflected in all of her pastoral work. Her knowledge and experience around safeguarding and child protection has added massive value to the school and whilst our Designated Safeguarding Lead she dispatched that role with great insight and skill. The English Department have been very lucky to have had Mrs Blyth's input over the last 3 years and her passion and enthusiasm for the subject has been reflected in her lessons and contributions to department planning and resources.

Mrs Blyth will be missed and I am sure that the whole community will be wishing her well for the future.



Celebrating Success

It is with real pleasure that I share the fantastic news that **Ty Moorcroft** (Year 9) has been selected to represent Great Britain for Teamgym European Championship which is due to take place in Denmark this October. To be representing Great Britain is always a significant achievement and represents the culmination of Ty's hard work, dedication and talent. We can all be hopeful that October is sufficiently far off that the championship is not affected by COVID-19. Well done Ty!

Particularly during this lockdown, if you have any good news to share then please do contact us (nmcsweeney@emmbrook.wokingham.sch.uk) so that we can all celebrate together.

I would like to thank all who have contributed to the uniform consultation survey opened last week (524 responses at time of writing). The consultation will close tomorrow so there is still time to add your views (<https://tinyurl.com/emmbrookuniform>). There is much speculation in the news at present about how and when schools will begin to re-open. I am not a fan of speculation, but do rest assured we are staying up to date with all developments and guidelines to ensure that we will be able to re-open in a timely and safe manner. Take care.

Best wishes,

Nick McSweeney
Headteacher