

5th January 2021

Dear pupils, parents and carers,

I am really sorry to burden your inbox one more time! I did finish yesterday by foreshadowing that I may have to be back in touch following the PM's announcement last night – and of course that prediction has indeed come true.

So, as I am sure everyone is by now aware, the government has announced that all schools will remain closed until at least February Half-Term (well...everyone that is, apart from a few pupils whose astonishment in their Teams groups this morning proved that not everyone in the country was watching Mr Johnson last night!). This news, while not unexpected, is clearly not what we ever wanted to hear. I appreciate the difficulty that this situation poses for many families and promise that we will try to do everything we can to help reduce those difficulties over the coming six weeks.

During the last lockdown, we had 48 hours' notice and lacked the ability to provide the kind of responsive, live teaching provision we would have wanted to. Since then, our staff team have worked exceptionally hard to improve their knowledge and understanding of the potential live-streaming lessons could provide, should there be any further need for school closures. Today has been the stress-test of those updated skills, and I am so grateful to my colleagues for their successful efforts today to teach full lessons to pupils learning at home.

Today has been a relatively successful start. We have had 572 pupils log into lessons throughout today – and we have streamed over 150 lessons. We have, I think, proven that we have the ability to teach high-quality lessons throughout the next six weeks. Our thanks go to those 572 pupils for their patience and engagement (and even, dare I say, comic contributions and sense of fun, which has been clearly in evidence across the bandwidth all day!)

Although we are pleased with the start we have made, we do know that there are areas that will take a bit of time to get right – I would ask for patience as staff (including some very old duffers like me!) get to grips with the mass use of this technology. We are already learning little tweaks that are helpful in making lesson delivery clearer and better, and we will continue to learn as we move forward. I have to confess that one of the school's main failures today was down to my not inability to successfully move my Year 9 French group into another teacher's 'virtual classroom' because I have spent my day in endless meetings. Sadly, as a result my wonderful Year 9s were left abandoned in a Teams room on the internet! My apologies to you all – I promise to learn to do better next time! We also have had a

few issues with Teams invites going astray, which we think we have worked out the cause of and hopefully rectified.

My thanks also go to the team of Mrs Rutter and Mrs Hazell, who have done an astonishing job of clearing password reset and logon queries throughout the day. The flood has now slowed to trickle, and I am sure that parents and pupils appreciate their efficient problem-solving every bit as much as I do. They will continue to be available to help when you email data@kla.eastern-mat.co.uk. Please do just give them an hour or two to get to it and find your solution!

We have now allocated every laptop that we were given by the Department for Education. We have no more laptops in school at the moment, but the government did announce that there may be further deliveries to come. If we do get any further stock, I will let parents know. We have distributed almost 150 devices, which is really reassuring, and of course, those pupils will have the use of those machines well beyond the pandemic, so at least one positive has been found of all of this.

We will continue our remote learning approach tomorrow, again by using Teams invites to pupils' school email addresses and generally keeping them with their usual teachers, before we then look to make a few timetable tweaks later in the week, to help us maintain the level of staffing we need to care for vulnerable and critical worker pupils in school.

Finally, the other major announcement last night was for Year 11, as the PM announced that 'not all GCSE exams will be able to take place as normal this year.' This is a vague statement and we are not yet at all sure what will happen in place of the exams. There is much to say on this matter, and I will be writing to all Year 11 pupils and their families later this week to provide our view of the situation in which they find themselves, and how we intend to approach helping them through it – I am told that there is to be an update on this tomorrow coming from the Secretary of State, so I will wait to see what that contains before writing again. If you are a parent of a Year 11 pupil, please keep an eye out for that communication arriving in your inbox – in the meantime it is vital that our Year 11s keep their focus and hard work going. While there are unlikely to be 'traditional' exams we are expecting that Year 11 pupils will still have to provide assessed work, so their grades are still very much 'up for grabs'.

We hope that you have been pleased with the start that we have made to this latest (and hopefully last) period of school closure. If your child was one of those few who were unable to log in today, perhaps because of ICT or login issues, please accept my apologies and we will try again tomorrow with hopefully more success. We will check the attendance registers again tomorrow, and then contact parents of any pupils who are not successfully participating to see if we can better support them to manage to do so.

Finally – a little look back. When we were in this position last year, it is important to remember that our pupils overwhelmingly managed the last lockdown very successfully – and parents did an amazing job keeping them learning throughout. Almost all pupils returned to KLA in September happy, relaxed and having shown great resilience during an undeniably difficult time; in short, they managed much

more naturally than we probably had expected them to! We really look forward to welcoming them back and then getting our school back to normal, but in the meantime please try not to worry too much. We have done this once pretty successfully and I am confident that we will manage it again together this time - but even better!

Best Wishes,

Alan Fletcher