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Headteacher: Mr M Wignall

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Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to you, a few weeks into the new school term, to keep you informed of our curriculum organisation and to provide some insight and contextualisation behind our decision-making.

As I am sure you are aware, during these difficult times, our first priority is to try and ensure the safety of all children and adults at Downlands. I hope you will understand that we have a huge responsibility to members of our school community who are either “vulnerable” or “extremely, clinically vulnerable”. As well as trying to maintain, where possible, their safety. We also take seriously our responsibility to our wider community with potential transmission and infection to vulnerable people such as parents/carers and grandparents. The advice given to schools such as ours, is that all children should remain in “bubbles”, for example Year Groups to minimise the risk of transmission and infection. In effect this means we are running five “schools” within the same building and staffing with the same resources. This has entailed considerable planning and adaptation to ensure the school can open and function effectively.

Sadly, in these circumstances, our school cannot function as “normal”. Students being placed in “bubbles” mean that they are presently taught in specific areas of the school. Some schools are bringing in students “part time” and/or using “blended learning” whereby students are being asked to focus on part of their studies at home via ICT. At Downlands we have made the conscious decision to try to maximise the interaction in learning by offering as far as possible a full school day.

Some other schools have decided the challenges faced mean they have had to restrict the subjects they offer as part of their curriculum. At Downlands we have decided, in the best interests of students, we will continue to offer a broad, balanced and full curriculum. In the circumstances, this means adapting the curriculum we can offer and this presents significant challenges, particularly in delivering the practical elements of the curriculum. I am immensely proud of the efforts put in by Downlands staff in amending the curriculum. Their efforts have been as extraordinary as the circumstances in which we all find ourselves and we will continue to review and revise our curriculum in the light of experience. However, please understand that, whilst many schools have truncated their curriculum offer, we continue to offer practical experiences in subjects such as PE, Dance, Drama, Art and Forest Schools, despite the inherent challenges in delivering such subjects in the present circumstances

As you will be aware, Government guidance to schools is that resources should not be shared across “bubbles”. This presents considerable challenges in dedicated practical spaces such as PE, Music, Art, Technology and ICT amongst others. These areas and associated equipment require specific cleaning and sanitising if used by different Year Groups within the school day. This cannot be done between lessons within the normal school day. Sanitising each item of equipment is time consuming and I hope you will understand this means prioritising access to certain resources. Our rationale in decision-making is to prioritise GCSE groups. Regrettably, this means some lessons will be based, at times, more upon theory than practical application.

Obviously, we would prefer it if we could run our school as “normal”. Unfortunately, circumstances dictate that



this is not possible. This means adaptation to what is delivered, how it is delivered and where it is delivered. Similarly, such adaptations have had to be applied to the start of the school day, break time, lunchtime and the end of the school day and where and how students can meet in social areas. As we are now into autumn and will soon be in winter these challenges will perhaps be even more acute. We continue to work with students to help develop their understanding of their responsibilities concerning their conduct in the wider community both before and after school

We will endeavour to continue looking at creative methods of timetabling, which may allow us to introduce a gradual reintroduction of the more practical elements of the timetable. However, once again, please understand that practical spaces are, in the most cases, "fixed", practical resources are "finite" and opportunities to clean and sanitise to ensure safety are limited and challenging.

We thank all stakeholders within the school and wider community for their understanding and forbearance at this time and hope we can count on your continued support. Please be assured we are constantly trying to find ways to improve what we do within the current constraints that we face. Our overriding priority has been and will continue to be, trying to ensure the safety of our school community.

We are currently in the process of developing more detailed and bespoke presentations that will be shared with parents/carers. Please bear with us while we develop these resources.

If you have any queries regarding this letter, please contact rdavies@downlands.org

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Davies', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mr R Davies
Deputy Headteacher