



MIDDLEWICH HIGH SCHOOL

HEIDI THURLAND BA (HONS 1ST CLASS) NPQH HEADTEACHER

3rd February 2021

Dear families,

I wanted to write to you to update you with some key information and recognise your excellent work and support this half term.

Yr11GCSE / BTEC examinations – I have responded to the exams consultation on behalf of our school community having carefully considered the views of staff and school leaders both locally and nationally. It will be interesting to see how the evidence base for awarding grades and the appeals process will work. I will of course update you as soon as I know more. In the meantime it is clear that the work students are doing now will continue to play a part in the award of their final grades. Therefore, as I have always said – knowledge is power – keep engaging in the learning being set by your teachers. This knowledge will help you in the next few months and more importantly into and beyond your post-16 qualifications.

Teaching & Learning at MHS - The Covid pandemic has seen school staff having to adapt quickly to an ever changing situation. Regardless of the difficulties and obstacles this has thrown our way, Teaching and Learning is at the forefront of what we are doing. In many ways the Teaching and Learning strategies used face to face in the classroom are transferable to remote learning but there are many other factors to consider: screen time, social and emotional wellbeing of our students, lack of technology, shared devices. MHS staff are working collaboratively to ensure that we are meeting the needs of our students and providing the best possible education that we can in the current climate. Our Teaching and Learning leads, Mrs Beechener and Mrs Parkins, are regularly holding CPD meetings to update staff on best practice and to streamline our use of Google Classroom. Underpinning all that we are doing is up to date research around the best approaches to remote learning. Some of these approaches are outlined below:

- Our blended learning approach. The McAleavy report 2020 states that an approach that combines live, pre-recorded and independent tasks is the best way forward for online learning.
- Minimising 'teacher talk' in live lessons. Current research and student feedback has shown us that students thrive when live lessons contain around 20/25 minutes of direct instruction and then dedicated time for students to complete work independently.
- Chunking of material to aid student understanding. Remote learning means that we aren't having that face to face experience of seeing if a student is struggling, therefore chunking of new material and presenting this in small bursts is vital for understanding.
- In the latest Ofsted and EEF guidance they emphasise the need for recapping of previously learnt information and for modelling and scaffolding of new material or approaches to completing tasks. These are strategies that we have been implementing and practising since September at MHS.

We evaluate our practice weekly and take on board feedback from students and families – so thank you for letting us know when we are getting things right and also what is or is not working for you.

Return to School – The Government has announced that they are 'hopeful' that schools can begin to return from the 8th of March. At this stage we do not know if this will be a full or phased return. We

do know that it is dependent on a number of volatile measures so at this stage we regard this as a best case scenario. As always as soon as I know what is happening I will communicate quickly with you.

Wellbeing – A key concern of mine is the amount of screen time we are all involved in currently. Whilst we have chosen a blended approach to enable students and staff to work flexibly we recognise that in reality we are at our screens 5 hours a day 5 days a week. This has meant that perhaps some of the things that helped us cope with the summer lockdown are not as possible at the moment. In my own household for example we took time out to bake, to create, to walk or run and to enjoy nature. Therefore we have decided as a school to build screen free time into our curriculum. On Wednesday the 10th Feb we will be offering an alternative set of ‘screen free’ options which will run from 1.00-15.00pm. We have a wellbeing menu for you to select from, live lessons and online work will not be set during this time. We have also asked staff to be away from their screens. Please share your wellbeing activities with us – we hope to see lots of smiles and happy faces! Send any photos into our admin email and we will share this on social media.

Safeguarding - Just a reminder that there are a number of resources which are available if your child is struggling. These can be found in the Safeguarding area of our website. Please encourage your son/daughter to talk to their Form Tutor or Progress Leader if he/she is struggling in any way and needs to talk to someone. I would also remind you that we have a launched a dedicated email address for students who may have worries and feel unable to contact staff directly (wellbeing@middlewichhigh.cheshire.sch.uk). This can be used during working hours and will be checked by our safeguarding team.

Yr9 Options Process – Over the past two weeks we have been busy interviewing students to support them in their Yr9 options process. On the 11th of Feb we will be running a subject discussion day where Yr9 can book in to speak to subject teachers to discuss options with them. This will be run through *Schoolcloud* online video call platform (*Details are on our website*). Appointments will run through the day until 18.30pm. We ran the same system with Yr11 families last week and it proved very successful. Yr9 options forms will be electronic this year, information will be released shortly about this.

ICT Access and internet access - The DfE is working with the following phone providers at present to offer data to support access to educational websites/remote learning:

- Three
- Smarty
- Virgin Mobile
- EE
- Tesco Mobile
- Sky mobile

Other phone providers may join in due course. If you have an issue with *internet access itself* please contact admin and we will see if are able to apply for data on your behalf.

Rewarding Student Work – It has been brilliant to see lots of students being recognised for their work, we are working hard to make sure that we celebrate the work of as many students as possible. It is lovely when families share this with us. Keep sending your pictures into our admin email.

Academy Conversion Consultation – We are now nearly at the end of our consultation period regarding Academy conversion to the Sir John Brunner Foundation. This week I will be meeting with staffing Unions to discuss implications for staff. We were delighted to have received presentations to the Full Governing Body and to all staff over the last two weeks from the SJB Foundation. Staff and Governors were reassured that the Foundation will be a key driver in school improvement but also importantly shares our ethos and values. To find out more about the Sir John Brunner Foundation you can visit their website: <https://sirjohnbrunnerfoundation.co.uk>. If you have a question about Academy conversion please email: academy@middlewichhigh.cheshire.sch.uk

Staffing Update – I need to update you on a few changes to our staffing structure as we move into the second part of the Academic Year. Due to curriculum changes Clare Holmes will be leaving us at Easter. Mrs Holmes has worked for MHS for over 26 years and has played a significant part in the development of a wellbeing ethos at the school. She is going on to develop some exciting work in this field and we wish her every success in her future. Elaine Atkin Nash has also secured a new post and will leave us at the end of this half term. Mrs Atkin-Nash has been integral in improving our social media and website communications and of course supporting literacy through her work in the library. We wish her well in her future career.

Finally I would like to thank each and every member of our school community for your determination, resilience, courage and kindness. The messages of support that are circulated weekly within our community are uplifting and remind us that although we are working remotely we are not alone. I continue to feel immense pride when I observe the achievements of our exceptional young people – you really are unstoppable.

Best wishes to you all,

We've got this.

Heidi Thurland



Headteacher Middlewich High School
Excellence in Learning – Achievement for All

Useful emails:

admin@middlewichhigh.cheshire.sch.uk - general enquires/ICT support/data support/ social media posts / recognition of student work

academy@middlewichhigh.cheshire.sch.uk – enquires regarding academy conversion