

12<sup>th</sup> February 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

I am writing to you as we head towards the February half-term break. I am pleased to say that Arnold Hill Academy has remained open throughout this half-term, despite the snow and ice, to: Children of Critical Workers, Children with an EHCP (Education Health Care Plan), Children with social worker involvement, and Vulnerable students. Each day we have had over 100 students on-site, fully supported by our hardworking staff while our teachers deliver remote learning and live lessons so that every student has a full timetable of lessons to follow. I must share a huge 'thank you' to all our dedicated staff at Arnold Hill. I am sure you will agree, they continue to show they have 'ultimate resilience' and we are very proud to have such a dedicated team. This has been an extraordinary effort from our staff and I want to thank all of our parents and carers who have emailed, telephoned or left gifts and cards at school to say 'thank you' to our staff for their efforts. I want you to know that these messages are very welcome and we are grateful for your ongoing support. The vast majority of our students have engaged regularly and positively with our on-site and remote learning provision. We appreciate just how difficult it is for many families at the moment and thank all of you for your efforts encouraging your children to stay engaged with their school work.

At this point we are awaiting government updates on the wider opening of schools and when this might happen, as well as waiting on the outcome of the DfE/Ofqual consultation on the process for awarding grades to students who were due to sit examinations in the summer. On Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January, the Prime Minister announced that it would not be possible to resume face-to-face learning immediately after the February half-term and instead hopes it will be safe to commence the re-opening of schools and colleges from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March. If the Government achieves its target of vaccinating everyone in the four most vulnerable groups with their first dose by 15<sup>th</sup> February, then those groups will have developed immunity from the virus around three weeks later, that is by 8<sup>th</sup> March. It is for this reason that the Government hope to commence the reopening of schools from Monday 8<sup>th</sup> March.

We are told that schools, as well as students, parents and carers will be given at least two weeks' notice to prepare for a return to face-to-face education. Until that time Arnold Hill will remain open to vulnerable children and young people and the children of critical workers after February half-term, as we are now. All other students will continue to receive remote education at home.

### **Remote Learning**

Thank you again for your continued efforts at home, we know that it is not an easy task and we are grateful for all the support you have put in place so we can teach your children remotely. I want to share a brief round-up of achievements this month, which we have only achieved by working together.

- Live Lesson elements, every Lesson!
- 'Live Lesson Legends' awarded every day to students. Please have a look on our Facebook and Twitter pages at the amazing successes this half term
- 'Wellbeing Wednesdays': weekly tips shared each week via social media from our PE department
- 'Feel Good Fridays': weekly ideas on activities for the weekend shared on social media

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- Virtual Parents Evening for Key stage 5 and Year 11. These were incredibly successful; 89% of parents reported that they found this method more effective and convenient. This is an entirely new way of working for teachers, parents/carers and students. We have been very impressed with the positive feedback we've been hearing from parents and staff alike. Like a number of changes, we have been forced to make during the pandemic, this may well be something we continue to use when things revert back to more 'normal' times. Watch this space as we will carefully review anything before adopting 'remote parents' evenings permanently.

### **February half-term break**

I am pleased for our staff to confirm that, unlike the Easter holidays and May Half-Term break last academic year, Arnold Hill will close to students over February half-term and will not remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers during that week. I hope all our staff and students can use this time to enjoy some well-deserved rest. If students notice that they have any 'scheduled' lessons on Microsoft Teams during half term, please be clear that these lessons will not be running during the half-term break. Our teaching team have set up calendars to repeat and this does not take into account the school holidays. Please be assured no work is expected to be completed over half term.

### **Contact Tracing over the February half-term break: Message for parents/carers of students who have continued to attend school on-site prior to the February half-term break**

If your child tests positive for COVID-19 having developed symptoms within 48 hours of being in school then we ask parents/carers to please complete this form as soon as you learn about the positive test by clicking on this link <https://forms.gle/PKZ4nZoXQf6eRU9bA> This will allow us to assist in identifying close contacts during the break and advising self-isolation where appropriate.

### **Examinations**

We are expecting OFQUAL to release their findings from the consultation on Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, with further guidance released by exam boards following this date. We will of course share this information with you as soon as possible, once we have finalised confirmed plans with the exam boards and our Trust of schools. Parents and carers of students in Year 11 and Year 13 please continue to encourage your child to continue working hard with their studies as they will be required to complete assessments to help inform their final grades.

We can confirm that students will be required to complete assessments in school as part of the evidence required to assign grades. These assessments will be planned to take place in the terms following Easter until the end of this academic year. The final dates for these will be confirmed following the release of the final guidance from the exam boards. Please can you continue to encourage your child to engage in their learning, both online and in lessons when we return to school following this period of lockdown. All lessons and interventions being delivered are planned to support students prepare for the assessments planned in order to achieve a fair grade this summer.

### **Asymptomatic Testing**

It was first announced that secondary schools would be rolling out asymptomatic testing using lateral flow tests on Wednesday 16th December. We have written previously to parents and carers explaining the process and confirming that we are fully engaged with this programme. We have been testing

staff and students in school throughout this half-term and are very pleased with how the programme has been running. Students taking part will swab themselves under supervision, and consent will be required before testing takes place. We will be testing all staff and students who want to participate. An instructional leaflet with some more information can be viewed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1faVgoEX-YunOOsM5okIsXtMu\\_VKhvVvS/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1faVgoEX-YunOOsM5okIsXtMu_VKhvVvS/view?usp=sharing). If you are happy for your child to be tested, please complete the *electronic registration form and electronic consent statement* here: <https://forms.gle/Ns8jKqaNJKDcsax87> (one per student).

### **Keeping us updated with any changes to your Contact Details**

During lockdown we have noticed that some parents and carers have not been keeping us updated if their contact details have changed recently. This can cause frustrating delays when we need to communicate with you. Can you please make sure that you keep us up-to-date with any changes to your contact details, whether it be a move of house, new email address or an update to mobile phone numbers. In order for us to ensure you receive important information from the academy, it is essential that we have the correct contact information for you. Please send any changes to [schooloffice@arnoldhillacademy.co.uk](mailto:schooloffice@arnoldhillacademy.co.uk)

### **Safeguarding**

Our safeguarding team have been working extremely hard during the lockdown to keep our children safe. This has included making regular safe and well checks with parents and carers via our Tutors and additional contact for those most at risk. We have also been working very closely with our safeguarding partners to protect those who are vulnerable. Please continue to contact us should you have a concern about your child's safety or welfare or that of another child. All safeguarding information can be found on the home page of the website here:

<http://arnoldhillacademy.co.uk/>

Finally, I want to wish you and your family all the very best over the half-term break in the hope that we can start to return to some kind of normality soon. Please ensure you observe the National Lockdown restrictions, which mean that you must not leave, or be outside of your home except where necessary. Whilst some of what is being asked is not easy it is essential that we all play our part to keep everybody safe. Thank you as ever for your support and cooperation, we will continue to keep in touch and we look forward to welcoming students back at some time in the near future.

Kind regards,

**Matt Robertson**

Principal