



Edwinstree Middle School
A Voluntary Controlled Church of England School
NEWSLETTER for PARENTS & CARERS
Week Ending: 29/01/21

Diary Dates

	Entry and exit times Year 5 – 9:00am – 2:45pm Year 6 – 8:55am – 2:40pm Year 7 – 8:50am – 2:35pm Year 8 – 8:45am – 2:30pm
09/02/21	Parent Consultations
10/2/21	In school students at home – school operating online-Parent Consultations
11/2/21	In school students at home – school operating online Parent Consultations
12/2/21	In school students at home – school operating online Parent Consultations
15/2/21	Half Term

What happens if my child or a family member tests positive for Covid-19? If your child or family member tests positive or has symptoms, whether in school or on line, please inform us using the Covid-19 contact email: covid@edwinstree.herts.sch.uk. Any other absence please contact us via attendance@edwinstree.herts.sch.uk

After 4 weeks of operating yet another “new” school, we are aware, that as always with the continuous unplanned changes, not everything is working for our community as it should. I want to share what I think are our biggest concerns and what we plan to do.

What is troubling me most about the current school operations as of 28th January?

- We currently have under 20% of the students in our school, in lessons and yet they currently receive 50% of all our teachers teaching time. Due to COVID restrictions we can't have more than 15 in a class, so we are operating two classes or 50% of our “normal” timetable.
- 80% of our students are completing online learning and yet currently we can only devote 50% maximum of our teaching time for planning and feedback. Learning at home is harder, therefore, our online learning students require more support than we can currently give them, particularly in English and Maths.
- Some students are not engaging fully in the most important part of learning, the submitting of work and or the conversation with the teacher about problems and how we can help them. It is this that is key to continuing learning from home. This process is called feedback and is vital for their learning.
- Currently, English and Maths teachers and especially our youngest and inexperienced staff, are struggling to find enough time to feedback to all students. This takes hours of time on SMHW commentary and their current timetable does not give them the capacity to

do this and teach in school. I am setting them up to fail.

- Where staff are offering LIVE chats to support with feedback and students have attended to ask for help with a problem in their subject, they have found these events really helpful. We would like to see more attend these sessions, but we know it requires confidence to join a LIVE event and explain a problem or worry.
- The wellbeing of our community is fragile, resulting in everyone feeling under pressure and overwhelmed at times.
- Despite a few parents offering information on schools providing online learning of LIVE lessons, none are able to solve our fundamental problem; I have not found a school that has a solution to teaching a significant number of children in school and provide a full timetable of LIVE lessons.
- You received feedback on your child's progress in December and your data reports would have shown, that despite students getting up to speed and making rapid progress from October half term, this has not been enough to restore many students to where they would have been in attainment, without Covid. This will understandably be a cause of concern and worry.
- Since the start of the pandemic, you have not yet had an opportunity to meet at least the English and Maths teachers to find out the gaps in your child's learning and the plans we have to support them to make rapid progress, we believe you need to hear this asap.

How are going to address these concerns?

Solution 1: Finding ways to give the Core teachers of English and Maths more time to devote to online learning.

We are currently adjusting our timetables in school to provide more time out for the English and Maths team to support your child's learning at home. This week we have successfully **made** amendments to the Year 5 timetable to enable Mrs Tungatt (maths) and Miss Bailes (English) to have fewer teaching commitments in school. This will allow them to concentrate on the students working online and provide more opportunities for video work and support LIVE chats, interventions for those that are struggling and increase their ability to swiftly feedback to students who submit work for marking. Mr McCarthy will be teaching Maths to all Year 5 students. A copy of the timetable is attached for your information. We are now exploring similar solutions for each year group. More information next week.

As a parent, how can you help to alleviate this problem?

Please can you actively encourage your child to use the feedback systems if they are struggling with their English and Maths? They can use the comment box to contact the teacher, who will respond or join a LIVE chat. All English and Math teachers are now

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offering this opportunity, the teacher will be waiting to hear their problems and to support them to solve any issues. This has proved the most effective method of supporting a student's online learning, please use these opportunities.

Solution 2: Create the opportunity for Parents and Carers to meet with Core teachers of English and Maths in the week before half term.

During the last week of half term, all parents and carers will be offered an opportunity to meet online with their child's English and Maths teacher. This will take place for each class within normal school hours from Tuesday – Friday. The School Parents' Evening consultation system is the same one used by Freman College and further information will follow on how to book an appointment.

In order to implement this, I have made the decision to close the in-school operations from Wednesday 10th February to all students except the most vulnerable, defined as with an Education Health Care Plan [EHCP]. This puts us in a position to offer parents the opportunity to book an appointment with teachers of English and Maths from Tuesday 9th February to Friday 12th February. The exact days and times for each class will be available soon. If your child is currently attending school, we will contact you next week to explain our plans and support you to manage this change. **Please prepare your back up plans for your child to work at home from Wednesday 10/2/21 – Friday 12/2/21**

Why can't the other teachers in school keep the in-school learning going?

We are unable to staff the school with the team that remains because we are teaching in sets of 15 and less due to COVID restrictions. We simply do not have enough staff available. Instead, our foundation subject teachers will offer online learning via LIVE Teams events over the three days.

What online learning will be taking place for all the students at home?

As from Wednesday 10/2/21 to Friday 12/2/21, our foundation subject teachers will offer students in each year group a series of lessons in the subjects that they have not had an opportunity to explore this year. Our focus will be to take a key threshold learning concept in that subject and use 'joy and engagement' to support students to re-engage with their missing subjects. ie Year 8 will be working with History, Art and ICT. Year 5 will explore Design and Technology as one of their "new subjects".

Solution 3: Trying to put this in perspective and support the wellbeing of you and your family

I would like to start by saying thank goodness the age range of children we are working with means they have time to re-engage with learning and build their attainment again, prior to any serious education exams and or life choices. Please remember, despite the press hysteria, your child will survive and achieve in the future. I would like to remind you that we are a caring and compassionate

school and we are here to help. The wellbeing of you and your family comes first! If you can't complete the work, we are here to support not chastise. If everything gets too much let us know via admin@edwinstree.hert.sch.uk or contact your child's Head of Year or the Learning Zone. Prioritise their learning and remember if they are completing English and Maths every week, this is a positive.

Please encourage students to attend Collective Worship, try the wellbeing techniques posted by Mr Galanides in SMHW and engage in the connectedness activities that are being provided by Head of Year. These are designed to support students' mental health and give them a sense of belonging, calmness and hope. These are all key strategies recommended by the Educational Psychologists. Heads of Year also offer phone contact and or drop in LIVE chats for students and again, where students engage in these chats they are having impact, so do encourage them to connect with our pastoral team.

What other concerns have been raised about online learning and how are we addressing them?

LIVE lesson cancellations, I apologise but unfortunately when a member of staff is unwell, the LIVE sessions are cancelled. Currently two members of staff are absent due to illness and the cancellations affect Year 7 or Year 8 students at home.

Titles not appearing as they should in SMHW: A few parents have queried that when their child uses SMHW, they are not receiving the whole title to the work, we have reported this with SMHW who are looking into the problem.

We have been asked why we can't put the date and time on the title for any LIVE session: We are sorry this is too long a set of information and you would not see this in the title. We will continue to flag LIVE in the title and the information guide will specify the time.

What is the best way to access LIVE lessons?

Any links to live sessions can be found on the SMHW noticeboard, or within the distance learning itself. However, we've had some feedback from parents to say that they are sometimes difficult to find. To try and help this situation, staff are pulling together a document that has all the required links on it so they are all in one place. This is quite a time-consuming exercise but we aim to publish the document on our website early next week www.edwinstree.herts.sch.uk.

The best thing you could do to get around this is to download the Teams app (available on a laptop, computer, tablet or phone) or log into Teams through Office 365. All students have a login, which is their school email address and password. Mr Hamilton has shown the vast majority of KS3 students how to do this in lessons before Christmas; Mr Rowlands has shared a video with all of KS2 explaining how to

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log in to Teams. The calendar in Teams will show them when the sessions are taking place and at what time. You also have the option to turn on notifications for events.

What is their school email address?

It is their computer login plus **@edwinstree.herts.sch.uk**. Their computer login is the year **their year group started at Edwinstree**, their first name and first letter of their surname (with a few exceptions). For example, the login for a Y7 student called Sarah Winter (even if she started this academic year) would be 18sarahw@edwinstree.herts.sch.uk

What is their password?

The password is the same password they would use to log into the computers **at school**. These cannot be reset or changed at home. If you don't want to use the app or Office 365 and enter sessions as a guest, your child needs to enter their full name and class name as their 'guest name'. We are starting to not let people through the lobby if we can't work out who someone is. If your child struggles to access Teams or remember their password please contact Mrs Heywood on r.heywood@edwinstree.herts.sch.uk

Who will help? As a back-up we are posting links to the LIVE sessions on SMHW but the above entry is the easiest and most efficient. We will continue to publish the LIVE timetable on our website www.edwinstree.herts.sch.uk

Why have Year 8 students in school been asked NOT to attend school on Friday?

Currently there is a significant shortage of supply teachers, as many agencies have furloughed their staff, please be aware if teachers are absent or self-isolating, we may not be able to find cover for them and due to Covid restrictions, we cannot use staff in other bubbles for support. If we pull our staff into school, we also damage their time to support the 80% of students learning at home. We will do our very best to give you notice but always have a back-up plan in place.

Will the school be open in February half term?

Latest information from the DfE regarding February half-term

Schools will close as usual over February half-term and are not expected to remain open to vulnerable children and the children of critical workers during that week.

Will pack lunches and vouchers be available in half term? Sadly no.

The Government statement: Schools do not need to provide lunch parcels or vouchers during the February half-term. There is wider government support in place to support families and children outside of term-time through the Covid Winter Grant Scheme <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance/covid-19-free-school-meals-guidance-for-schools#support-for->

[families](#)>. The £170 million scheme is being run by local authorities in England, with at least 80% of the funding earmarked to support with food and essential utility costs and will cover the period to the end of March 2021. It will allow local authorities to directly help the hardest-hit families and individuals over the winter period. Local authorities have local ties and knowledge, making them best placed to identify and help those children and families most in need.

In order to support families that need help during this time Mrs Marler and PP support will research further into how you can access this grant. We will also liaise with the Buntingford Food Bank to support those who need support. Please email: Buntingford.foodbank@gmail.com for more information

Message from the Science Team:

We hope that you are continuing to enjoy the science distance learning. We are including and adapting practical experiments as much as possible! We miss having students in the labs with us. Due to staff illness this week, our focus has been getting the next set of learning ready for all students across the school for Monday. This week you might have noticed that we haven't given feedback on last week's learning, we will get to this as soon as we can. As always, we will respond to your comments and questions via SMHW at the specified time. Your kindness and compassion when commenting will be much appreciated, we are doing our best to respond to everyone.

Jo Gant
Headteacher

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