

April 3rd 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

At about 12.30 this afternoon I and the rest of the Senior Leadership Team would normally be visiting each form room to dismiss the girls for the Easter break. Slowly we would all be packing up our things and heading out to our various holiday destinations and within a couple of hours the school would be quiet. So given the circumstances, I am now doing that by this newsletter. This is my way of saying thank you for all your support this term; thank you for the care and commitment you have shown to the WGGS community and I hope that you can now have a break but just before I end, here are some messages.

Sadly, shortly after school closed, I become unwell and for a short time was really very ill. I don't know if it was COVID 19 because fortunately I did not have to seek medical attention however it did mean I had to allow others to look after me for a few days. It has taken a while to get my strength back and I am utterly grateful for the incredible support I received from lots of staff and knowing that the rest of the Senior Leadership Team would continue our work without me. I hope that we all of us can remain medically and emotionally untouched by the coronavirus, however I doubt this will be the case. The lesson I have learned is that you have to allow others to look after you; knowing when to ask for help can be our greatest strength. If your daughter is, or becomes ill or for some reason is unable to work at home while the school is closed then please keep us informed through the absence emails, which means staff will know not to chase her for work and we can offer any support we can.

Schools have found a wide variety of methods to enable their pupils to continue learning. WGGS has chosen to use emails to send instructions and given students access to resources on the school network via Portico and I am pleased to say for the vast majority of pupils this is working well. We have decided not to provide a timetabled programme of live stream lessons via video link for a number of reasons:

- Safeguarding and data protection– video broadcasts create a number of issues regarding privacy and unfiltered access to staff and pupil homes.
- Accessibility – surveys before the school closed indicated that a significant number of pupils did not have individual access to a device or internet access. Teaching staff were also not guaranteed to own devices that would also provide live streaming facilities and although all the school's laptops were loaned to staff before closure, there were not sufficient for all.
- Accommodation – neither pupils nor teaching staff can guarantee to have a private, uninterrupted time in the school week in which to have a lesson.
- Teaching Union Guidance – the major teaching unions have advised their members not to participate in live streaming lessons.

The decision not to require all teaching staff to teach via live streaming platforms was deliberate and it could only ever be used in circumstances that were safe and equitable. However, we have not discounted the use of live streaming and will work to identify the very specific conditions under which this might take place.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to all the staff who have volunteered their services over the last few weeks. Our school minibuses have been lent to a Hertfordshire pool and staff who can drive them have joined the scheme that will provide the transport needs of local health or care services. I am grateful to all those that put others before themselves I hope they will also hear the weekly applause that can be heard on a Thursday evening. I will be asking all the girls to produce an A4 letter or photo to show her appreciation that can be displayed in local hospital ward. Maybe it can be a family effort, and if you would like to contribute please send it to Head@watfordgirls.herts.sch.uk.

I hope you and your family have a restful holiday break. We may be isolated from each other, but we are still Watford girls.

Best wishes

Sylvia Tai

Headmistress