

12<sup>th</sup> February 2021



Dear Parent/Carer

As we head into the February half-term break, I cannot help but reflect on the challenging start to the year we have all had. From the introduction of a new national Lockdown, to school closures and the bitter winter weather, every week has brought new and more difficult challenges. That being said, I am in awe of how smoothly the students of One In A Million Free School have switched to a full Remote Learning timetable meaning that our lessons have managed to continue, no matter the weather! I am particularly proud of how well our students have adapted to having to work from home. I completely understand parental frustrations regarding "home schooling" and want to reassure everyone that, as a school, we want to bring our children back to school as soon as is safely possible.

### Remote Learning and Exam Grading

The questions I am most frequently asked, tend to focus on how Year 11 students will be awarded their grades this summer following the Prime Minister's announcement that GCSE exams will not take place as normal. Unfortunately we are not yet in possession of any further information. Ofqual (the exams regulator) recently conducted a consultation (that we took part in) and we await their official response which should arrive after half-term. As soon as I know anything more concrete, I will contact you again to fully explain how we will proceed. In the meantime, can I once again urge you as parents to remind your children to submit all the work they are completing remotely, as this work provides an excellent evidence base for teachers to compile predicted grades for college and sixth form applications. Conversely, can I once again remind parents that if children do not complete their remote work and Zoom sessions, and submit work to their teachers, their predicted grades may fall and this could harm their chances of gaining a place at the next steps destination of their choice. Every parent can access their child's Remote Learning portal, ClassCharts, by using their own login codes. If you want to access ClassCharts but need help accessing your account, please do not hesitate to contact school for support.

I also know that every parent will be keen to know when their child will be able to return to school. Once again, I am afraid that we do not have any further detail on schools returning; however, it is important to stress that the date of 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021 was named by the Prime Minister as the earliest possible date of a return to school, rather than a guaranteed return date. There are many factors which will affect the return of schools, including specific infection rates within individual areas. As such,

ONE IN A MILLION ★ F O U N D E D I N 2 0 0 5



A: One In A Million Free School, Cliffe Terrace, Bradford, BD8 7DX  
T: 01274 723439, E: school@oneinamillion.org.uk W: oiam.org/freeschool  
f oneinamillionbradford t Twitter: @OneinaMillion\_  
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the government will have to provide much clearer information and guidance on reopening before we can inform you on how the process will work. Once again, as soon as I have any more information, I will contact you to let you know how OIAMFS will proceed. In the meantime, we will continue to carry out all the normal day to day operations of the school remotely. This includes Parents Evenings and the Year 9 Options Evening. We will be in touch after half term with the dates and times of these events.

In respect of the Year 11 Parents Evening, this will take place virtually on Wednesday 3rd March'21, and a Zoom meeting invitation will be sent out after half term.

### **Remote learning and Online Safety**

As remote learning continues, I know it can be difficult talking to your child about what they're doing online or who they might be speaking to. But talking regularly, like you would about their day at school, will help your child feel relaxed and mean that when they do have any worries, they are more likely to come and speak to you. It can help to:

- Reassure them that you're interested in their life, offline and online. Recognise that they'll be using the internet to research homework as well as talking to their friends.
- Ask your child to show you what they enjoy doing online or apps they are using so you can understand them.
- Be positive but also open about anything you are worried about. You could say "I think this site is really good" or "I am a little worried about things I have seen here."
- Ask them if they are worried about anything, and let them know they can come to you.
- Ask them about their friends online and how they know they are who they say they are.
- Listen for the reasons why your child wants to use apps or sites you don't think are suitable, so you can talk about these together.
- Ask your child what they think is okay for children of different ages so they feel involved in the decision making.

The following website has further information and support

- <https://nationalonlinesafety.com/guides/online-safety-tips-for-children>

### **Holiday Hunger Fund**

Over the February half term holiday, the Holiday Hunger Programme will be available, and around 60 voluntary sector organisations have been funded by Bradford Council to help support families over this time. These organisations remain committed within their communities to provide access to food over the February half term period.

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f oneinamillionbradford t Twitter: @OneinaMillion\_

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If you are at all worried about how you will feed your children this school holiday, please visit [bradfordfoodbanks.org.uk](http://bradfordfoodbanks.org.uk) or ring 01274 431000, in the first instance.

Furthermore, should any family need help or assistance paying for their heating bills, we are happy to help you to gain access to the No Child Cold assistance scheme. If this is the case, please contact [info@oneinamillion.org.uk](mailto:info@oneinamillion.org.uk) if you would like further information.

## Therapy and Wellbeing

We are aware, now more than ever, that student wellbeing is crucial, with record numbers of children and young people reporting that they are experiencing stress and anxiety. We are delighted to announce that from next half term One In A Million Free School will be visited by a therapy dog, who will eventually be in the building every day. The therapy dog (a Labrador named Ben) will primarily be working with students in our SEND Hub; however, he will also be available for other sessions on a daily basis. As a therapy dog he has already passed extensive temperament tests and will be introduced into the school environment slowly. We know several local schools, including local primary schools have had phenomenal success when introducing a therapy dog and we are keen to offer our students those same opportunities.

Research clearly shows that therapy dogs have a hugely beneficial impact upon those they work with and can greatly reduce levels of stress and anxiety, as well as having a positive impact upon mental health and wellbeing. Furthermore, schools have reported that therapy dogs have also helped increase attendance rates and even improved literacy levels.

Whilst this information will undoubtedly be exciting for a large number of students, I completely understand that not everyone who attends school will want to interact with a dog for their own personal reasons. As such, we have ensured that there are numerous measures in place to ensure no student will have to interact with the dog, unless they want to including:

- The therapy dog will never be unattended and will always have an assigned handler to ensure he does not approach any children that do not want to interact with him.
- The therapy dog will only have access to certain parts of the school building.
- No child will have to interact with the dog that does not want to. This includes either touching or being touched by the dog.
- Full Risk Assessments are in place to ensure that the environment remains safe at all times.
- The therapy dog will be available for booked sessions only and will not disrupt learning at all.
- The option for any parent to request that their child does not interact with the therapy dog through an easy Opt-out system.

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I am sure that Ben will soon become a valued member of the school and bring many benefits to those who work with him, including lifting student spirit, encouraging communication, reducing anxiety and encouraging socialisation; however, if you do not wish for your child to engage with the therapy dog, please email [info@oneinamillion.org.uk](mailto:info@oneinamillion.org.uk) and provide your son/daughter's full name and form.

One other issue that we are becoming increasingly aware of is the disruption to sleep patterns that the Lockdown is creating for teenagers all over the country. Children are staying up later than ever and are tempted to use electronic devices before they try to fall asleep. We are also seeing a worrying rise in the numbers of children who are playing video games until the early hours of the morning. This, of course, is having a catastrophic impact upon their sleep patterns and their ability to engage in remote learning. Please could I urge you to support your children to maintain regular and sensible sleep patterns. If you require any additional help or support in this area then please contact the school and we will be happy to help.

### **Parent and Student Voice**

As always, your feedback is really important to the school, especially during these challenging times, therefore if you've haven't completed the Parent Voice questionnaire as yet, please could you take the time to do so. For those of you that have, thank you and I appreciate your support.

We have also made sure that we have actively sought feedback from our students regarding Lockdown and Remote Learning, with a particular focus on the quality of the OIAM Remote Learning provision. The results speak for themselves:

- 75% of students find Remote Learning helpful in supporting their learning
- 71% feel that they are making good progress
- 70% find that Zoom lessons are enjoyable
- 82% found teacher feedback to be useful in improving the quality of their work

I am delighted that our efforts have been recognised by both the students and also the parents within our community. We were thrilled to receive emails of thanks from parents regarding our teaching staff and the "exemplary support" that they have been offering. That being said, I am not surprised with these responses as the community we serve continually inspires me with its willingness to support each other, no matter how challenging the situation. Never has this been more evident than when parents of our children have returned their weekly food parcels, urging us to share them with those families more in need than themselves. The families of One In A Million truly form a wonderful community and it is one we are proud to be part of.

As always, we want to offer our students the very best provision we can so if you have any feedback regarding any aspect of the school, please do not hesitate to contact me.

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I hope you have a wonderful February half term. These circumstances and this pandemic cannot last forever, but the resilience, community spirit and willingness to work together and support each other certainly can.

With warmest regards,



Stuart Rees

Principal

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