



30<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear parents/guardians,

I hope that you and your family are doing okay and that everyone is well! I wanted to send you a message, just to let you know that we are thinking of you and trying to support you as best we can in the current circumstances. I sent an email to all students earlier today so ask them to read through it with you.

I have been so impressed with our students. The level of engagement, lack of excuses, perseverance, demonstration of a growth mindset and most importantly, the general gratitude that they have shown their teachers for their efforts has been heartwarming. They are a credit to you! Indeed, I am extremely proud of all of our students and all of our staff (teachers, admin and ancillary staff)!

The Assistant Principals, Deputy Principal and I have been trying to figure out how best to support our students and their families at this time. Our main advice is to maintain routine for students. Consider using the normal school day or timetable as a structure for their day. Support them as best you can but they are young adults so encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. Teenagers are the funniest, most imaginative, creative, adaptable, stubborn, hormonal, strong minded subset of human beings.....enjoy them! You are not expected to be *home tutors* and this is not *distance learning by design*! This is an emergency response at a very difficult time in our nation's history. Schools got very little notice regarding school closures! There was no "fire drill" for this so thanks to you all for your patience and solidarity as we figure this out together.

Hopefully we will all look back on this time and recollect tales of how we drove each other mad at home but that we got through it!

Please note the following:

- Encourage students to maintain a normal school routine. This is so important for their mental health.
- Learning is being sent to students through email & Office 365 (MS Teams/One Note/One Drive). Check their school email/Office 365 account regularly to see what learning they are getting and if they are completing it.....but it is their responsibility! There is a little video on our school website that we prepared to show students how to access Office 365. It might be useful if you don't know how to but all students *should* know how to access both Office 365 (contains MS Teams, One Note & OneDrive) and their email.
- If they are having IT difficulties, get them to email their Year Head who will try to resolve the issue. If email is the problem, then ask them to contact a friend/classmate to email the Year Head on their behalf. Alternatively, you could email the office ([colaistedelacy@lmetb.ie](mailto:colaistedelacy@lmetb.ie)) on their behalf and Blaithín will forward it to the relevant Year Head.
- Students have been advised to let their Year Head know if they are having difficulties, e.g. if someone is sick at home, if they are unwell, if they are genuinely worried or overwhelmed by the independent learning.....etc. If the volume of work that they are getting is too much, then they should let their Year Head know.
- The Year Heads have already been in contact with some of you directly and will continue to contact homes where there is a concern that a student is not engaging. They do so with the

best of intentions but they also totally understand that circumstances have changed in every home in Ireland so talk to them and let us know if we can help.

- We have reminded students about *online etiquette*:
  - communicating with their teachers in a polite and respectful way
  - not using "text-speak"/casual language
  - keeping responses formal and requests reasonable
  - not *replying all* or starting/continuing email threads
  - School rules applying online...etc.
- Remember that the teachers will go back over everything once school reopens. The pace will need to be fast so students need to try their best to lay a basic foundation now....it will pay off when we return.
- We truly appreciate that students with special educational needs will find learning remotely and independently more challenging. I have asked teachers to be cognisant of literacy levels and to keep instructions concise and clear. Differentiation of learning is difficult and even more challenging when engagement is not face to face. Don't worry if the student does not complete tasks fully....encourage them to complete what they can and more importantly develop their confidence to ask for clarity/help by emailing their teacher themselves! Where you have specific concerns, please email the office and your email will be forwarded to one of the SEN teachers.
- If you have a student in third or sixth year then please try not to worry! The reality is that the Leaving Certificate will be prioritised over the Junior Cycle exams/assessments as the latter is seen as a lower stakes assessment. The Department of Education & Skills and the State Examinations Commission are working on plans for the Leaving Certificate.....the students will be looked after! The DES & SEC are very aware that subject curricula are probably not finished and they will respond accordingly. The Minister for Education is still saying that he intends that the LC exams will go ahead so we need to proceed on that basis. Let the DES & SEC worry about the solutions and just try to keep the students focused on what is within their control. The students have been advised to reread everything and to keep practicing exam papers! All of the provisions made to date have been well documented and reported on in the media but can also be found here (<https://www.education.ie/en/Press-Events/Press-Releases/2020-press-releases/PR20-03-19.html>). All developments are well reported in the media but keep an eye on [www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) and [www.examinations.ie](http://www.examinations.ie) for further updates.
- Further information is also available on [www.colaistedelacy.ie](http://www.colaistedelacy.ie) under the Covid-19 tab and also on Twitter @colaistedelacy.ie.
- The staff are constantly trying to learn new ways of facilitating your learning. For example; some teachers have started to explore MS Teams as a way of communicating and sharing resources with you. Be patient with us as we learn.
- We have advised teachers and students to put in a big effort this week and then take a break over Easter.

Finally, as parents/guardians, you have done an amazing job to date. Times like these make us reflect on what is truly important in life! Learning can be revised.....life can't! Stay safe and well!

Best wishes,

Janice Uí Bheoláin