

4 February 2021



Dear Parents and Carers,

Update from The Consortium Academy Trust

As we approach almost a year of interrupted education for our children and young people, we wanted to write to you with regard to our Blended Learning offer across the Trust. The letter contains an update, some housekeeping reminders and a polar opposite message about the use and occasional abuse of technology as we continue our reliance on these platforms.

As with any 'disaster' event a benefit is that it often stimulates rapid acceleration and positive change, from tragedy often comes long term development. Since the first lockdown in March 2020, as a Trust we have invested heavily in our infrastructure, resourcing and staff training to ensure that we were well prepared for the inevitable news in January that our schools would only remain open for vulnerable and critical worker children. This proactive investment, along with the ingenuity and creativity of our leaders and staff teams, meant that we were able to deliver our evidence based blended 'remote' learning effectively across the Trust within less than 24 hours of the Prime Minister's announcement on Monday 4 January 2021. Our home survey demonstrates that parents and carers have seen on average, a 12% improvement in remote provision between March and November 2020 (where appropriate for bubble closures) and early indications are that this will be further improved when we conclude our next survey in the coming few weeks.

The engagement of children and young people in the last three weeks has been extraordinary. As a profession we recognise that parents and carers are not teachers. Whilst we are so looking forward to welcoming our learners back to school, when it is safe to do so, we are grateful to our families for their unwavering effort and support to help children and young people continue with their blended learning activities, lessons and tasks. We are delighted that so many families have been in touch to ask for help in supporting their child's home learning and our academy websites now have helpful hints for parents to try and support your valiant efforts. We fear that together we may be in this for some time to come!

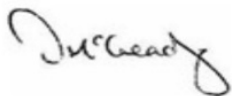
As part of our infrastructure investment we have worked hard on our systems, advice and guidance to learners and families with regard to online safety, as many children and young people are spending more time on line. In the vast majority of cases this reliance on technology has been used responsibly and appropriately and children and young people have engaged well in their learning and received feedback to help them progress in all aspects of their development. However, in a small minority of cases both internet-based technology and social media have been used irresponsibly. The capturing, distorting and sharing of images on social media as a consequence of engaging in learning provision is, at best, detrimental to the learning experience of all and impacts severely on the well-being and professional reputation of the teacher and, at worst, could be considered to be illegal. This type of abuse of technology and social media would not be tolerated in the physical classroom and will not be accepted in the virtual classroom. In incidents like these we have a duty to report all information to the Local Authority Designated Officer and whilst we do not wish to criminalise children we may be left, following advice, with no alternative but to report this to the police. We would strongly advise

parents and carers to be extra vigilant with their child's use of online and social media platforms at this time. Discuss with them their responsibility regarding sharing images that are inappropriate with others and, if you do find something which appears to be of concern, please report this immediately to your school. Each school has issued expectations of engaging in remote learning to parents and carers and secondary age learners and each lesson has an expectation screen to remind young people about these. There should be no excuse for inappropriate online behaviours!

To close, we would like to offer our thanks as a Trust, and as educational leaders, to the many parents, carers and learners who have sent, emailed and provided verbal comments of support and gratitude for the Herculean efforts our staff have made to ensure that our provision continues in these 'unprecedented times'. The few minutes it takes to send a message of thanks and encouragement cannot be underestimated for its positive impact. We share all of these with staff either individually or at school level and they mean the world to us – so, to all those who have sent their message of support, 'thank you!'.

And finally, to our Trust's learners – your resilience and commitment to your learning will define you as a generation of children and young people who, despite all the challenges you have faced, never lost sight of your aspiration and desire to learn and progress, we are so very proud of you!

Yours sincerely,



Dave McCready
CEO



Sarah Young
Director of Education