

13th January 2021

HEAD OF SCHOOL: Mr I Bacon

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to let you know of a change we have made to the plans to move into our brand-new building in Whitehouse.

Through until Christmas we have been working on the basis that the new build will be ready for the students to move into after Easter and as such, we have two INSET days planned, one either side of the Easter break, to facilitate moving out of Fairfields and being ready to receive the students when they return.

I must stress that the Local Authority and contractors are still on track with the schedule to allow us to facilitate this plan but after careful consideration **we** have decided to delay the move until immediately after the Whitsun half term.

This has not been an easy decision but is one that is based on one of our fundamental three aims – ‘the highest quality of care’ for our students. Lockdown is a difficult time for everyone, but all the research shows that it has the biggest negative impact on children, both in terms of their academic progress and their mental health. Whilst children are extremely resilient, they also thrive on consistency, continuity, and familiarity with their environment.

I am extremely concerned that, whenever the lockdown ends, most of our children will not have been to school for nearly 10 weeks. If the lockdown extends beyond February half term, potentially until Easter, then this could be a period away from school of up to 17 weeks before they return.

At the point the students return to Watling Academy after the lockdown they will need support to settle back into school, they will need familiar surroundings and routines, a familiar journey to school, the same classrooms, and potentially their own belongings that are still at Fairfields. I passionately believe that only with the backdrop of this consistency and familiarity will we as an Academy be able to best support the students on their return and ensure that instead of focusing on packing up, logistics of moving and acclimatisation planning we do what is most important – caring for and looking after our students and your children.

If we did not make this decision, then we would find ourselves in a position where at best the students may get 5 more weeks at Fairfields and at worst they would not return to our current home. Either way, the focus would be on the move and that is not what I want as the main focus when we welcome them back. I believe that Watling Academy, with the help of the whole community, has made Fairfields its home – at least temporarily, and our home is where I want the students to return after lockdown.

It is vitally important to us that the students all get some time in the new build to make it ‘theirs’ before the next cohort move in. The additional time at Fairfields will, of course, give us the opportunity to arrange visits to the new build for all the students, staff and, COVID/Tier permitting for parents and carers too. It will also give a chance for the Student Council to be more involved in the move and in putting forward their ideas for how we make the new build our home.

Respect / Responsibility / Kindness

This decision has been discussed with the Governors and Trustees and we have informed the Local Authority, who are fully supportive.

This will mean that the INSET days originally planned for Friday 26th March and Monday 12th April will now be on Friday 28th May and Monday 7th June and the students will begin their time in the new build on Tuesday 8th June. Obviously, the new date is based on the proviso that there are no new, as yet, unforeseen circumstances that would delay this!

I do hope that you understand the rationale for the decision and apologise for any inconvenience caused by changing the INSET day dates. I always feel it is better to make a positive, strong decision early rather than wait and hope and then find you are making that decision short of time to plan, consider and implement it successfully.

I will of course continue to update you on the progress of the build and our plans for making it our home.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a stylized 'M' and 'B' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Mr I Bacon
Head of School