

PRINCIPAL: S.W. BLACK, M.Sc.

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3rd April, 2020

Dear Parent/Guardian

I hope that this finds you and your family safe and well.

Only a matter of weeks ago, I would not have anticipated writing our end of term letter in circumstances where the school has been closed for two weeks. It would have been difficult to envisage the crisis in which we all find ourselves and that things which we took for granted would no longer be possible, at least in the immediate future.

Prior to that closure, it had been a busy and successful term, littered with numerous impressive pupil achievements, and with practices well underway for what is normally one of the highlights of the school year, our Spring Concerts. In the absence of the Spring Concerts and in advance of school closure, the Senior Choir recorded "Total Praise" and we have been delighted by the very large number of people who have taken time to view the recording on our website and other social media outlets.

School has certainly been a very different experience. I, like many others, miss the "buzz" of a normal school day and the personal interactions which that brings yet, there are many constants, not least in the adaptability and willingness of our pupils and staff, alongside the care and support which is evident amongst the Ballymena Academy community.

That care has been manifest in recent days, not only in the provision of safety equipment to local hospitals, but in the school continuing to remain open to facilitate supervision of key workers' children. Any parents wishing to avail of this facility should contact us in advance, either by e mail to info@balacademy.ballymena.ni.sch.uk or by telephoning the School Office. As I have stated previously, it is vital that we, as a school, continue to do what we can to support those who are risking so much to support us. We are thankful and appreciative of the many within our community who are in the frontline of these efforts; you are very much in our thoughts at this time.

For our senior pupils, some clarity is beginning to emerge in how grades in external examinations will be awarded through the [plan published today by Ofqual](#) for grading A-levels and GCSEs in England this summer. While the awarding process in NI is unlikely to be identical to that of England or Wales, it will undoubtedly encompass some of the elements of those processes when it is announced. That announcement will not be made by the Education Minister until the middle of next week and we will forward further details and guidance in due course.

We trust that the plan for NI will deliver a fair and consistent way of grading all qualifications in these challenging circumstances and, very importantly, allow young people to progress to the next stage of their lives without hindrance. Please be assured, that in the event that teacher professional judgement is to form part of the process in NI, teachers in Ballymena Academy have already been considering pupils' work and potential attainment with the utmost diligence.

I must congratulate the young people, encouraged by yourselves, for their engagement in continuing to study at home and although we appreciate that nothing can replace the classroom experience, nevertheless, learning and teaching has continued, albeit in a very different form. We are encouraging staff not to set academic work over what would have been our Easter break; however, we are intending to post some fun activities for pupils, who given the current situation, may want to continue to engage with our learning platform. These activities are totally optional but, as a school, we want to help if we can and we are very grateful to staff who have offered to contribute to this.

In closing, I wish to thank you for all your support and encouragement; it has been invaluable in such a period of uncertainty.

Best wishes to you and your extended family circles in the days ahead.

Please take care and stay safe.

Yours faithfully,



S.W. Black (Principal)



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