

14 May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

We hope that you and your families are keeping well during what has been an unprecedented couple of months.

To introduce myself, I am the CEO of the Suffolk Academies Trust - the organisation that is so proud to lead and support One Sixth Form College and Abbeygate Sixth Form College.

Whilst it is usually right and correct that nearly all communications come from our individual colleges, given the scale of the challenges that we are collectively facing at the moment, I wanted to personally write to provide some clarity and to highlight what we are doing as a Trust to support our students, our staff and our community.

The reopening of colleges

Firstly, it is important to recognise that there is so much speculation in the press at the moment in relation to students returning to college. Whilst there are still a great number of questions unanswered, and more guidance is being released on a daily basis, this is our position as it currently stands:

- It is with sadness that it is now clear that our year 13 and year 14 students will not be returning. We are supporting their transition to the next phase of their education or employment where we can, and we will communicate with all students over the coming weeks. It will be wrong of me, therefore, not to be one of the first to wish them the very best for their futures, they have done their college and, most importantly, themselves proud.
- The Government expects that secondary schools and colleges will be able to offer some face to face contact with year 12 students before the summer holidays. At this stage there is no set date for this. This does not mean that there will be a return to full timetables or students back in college full time, rather some support to supplement pupils' remote education.
- In line with implementing protective measures and reducing contact, schools and colleges are being asked to limit the attendance of the year 12 cohort in the setting at any one time and to keep students in small groups. Schools and colleges should also ensure that the use of public transport for travel to and from school/college is minimised, especially at peak times.
- In schools and college settings the basic principle is that classes should be halved. Normally one teacher should be allocated to a group but if there are any teacher shortages then support staff may be used to lead groups, under the direction of a teacher.

Clearly, each of these points needs a great deal of consideration and discussion. We simply don't want to add to the speculation and confusion that is currently circulating by giving you details about our response when plans are in their infancy and so many organisations are still debating the practicalities/viability of these aspirations.

What we can say is that we are coordinating our response based on three core principles. We will only open our doors to students once we are in the best possible position to:

- 1) Ensure social distancing requirements are met. The health and wellbeing of our students is paramount.
- 2) Provide face-to-face learning that meets the high standards we demand of ourselves. We will not open for the sake of opening.
- 3) Give clarity to staff so that they are confident that they can work in environment that is as safe as possible, and that we have adapted our processes to support their health and wellbeing.

In the face of so much uncertainty, we want to be clear on one thing. We need to address the challenges over the coming months in a united way. We will support all members of the community in the best way we can as we move back to a level of normality. We will also continue to evolve and strengthen our e-Learning offer.

Exam Results

Teachers are working incredibly hard as they prepare the evidence, they need to support their grade predictions for our students (Centre Assessed Grades).

This is a difficult practice, as it is important that we submit grades that not only evidences the work your child has produced, but also that the grade reflects their potential trajectory in “the last push” before the exam period.

This is a slow process, and we are going through the guidelines provided by exam boards for A-Level. In addition, the consultation about how vocational grades will be awarded has also just concluded, and we await the final outcome on that. We do know that the majority of students will be awarded a calculated grade based on a similar process to GCSEs and A-Levels.

We are doing all that we can to help your child secure the grades that they deserve, but all of our predictions will have to go through a national moderation framework. All students will receive their final grades in the summer. The FAQ document, on the college website, will continue to be updated as and when further information becomes available.

For our year 12 students, we understand that you may also be concerned about how we will predict your grades for your UCAS applications etc. Your teachers are using a range of data and assessments, so there are no immediate issues even though the year 12 internal exams have not been undertaken.

Thank you

Finally, thank you. We appreciate that as uncertain as things are for us as college leaders, this uncertainty is magnified in your homes where you are trying to plan for the needs of your families.

Your support has been humbling, and we hope that our dedication to your child is reflected in the efforts of all that we are doing to support them.

I will keep writing to each of you every Tuesday to update you on our collective approach and to update you on the next steps, which will support the letter and communications that will come to you directly from our colleges with specific plans

Thank you, as always.

Dr Nikos Savvas

Chief Executive Suffolk Academies Trust