

## Parental Survey: Online Learning FAQs

### Q: What suggestions have other parents got for supporting their child during online learning?

School Day Routine Suggestions	Afternoon Routine Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wake up, wash and dress for the day;</li> <li>Have breakfast together as a family;</li> <li>Set some targets for the day to stay motivated;</li> <li>Your child's workspace could be near yours so you are able to monitor engagement;</li> <li>A dedicated work area to give your child ownership and facilitate organisation with folders, stationary, ICT equipment all ready to hand;</li> <li>Have a timetable on the desk/next to screen;</li> <li>Mobile phones next door during lessons;</li> <li>Laptop screens that can be easily seen by you, so as to prevent temptation of browsing the internet whilst in a lesson;</li> <li>Break times are exactly that – a break away from screens, perhaps with a snack, a drink and some quick physical activity;</li> <li>Join in RW activities;</li> <li>Complete homework on the day it is set;</li> <li>School day finishes at 3.30pm to give defined separation of work and relaxation time;</li> <li>'Pack the bag' for tomorrow's lesson (or get the correct equipment ready and check what is due in).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Get out for fresh air and exercise;</li> <li>Agreed screen time and type (often a compromise!) which is important for socialising and maintaining connections;</li> <li>Dedicated alone time;</li> <li>Individual and family chores – expectations shared and understood;</li> <li>Making and eating dinner together, having ownership over ingredients and cooking;</li> <li>Using family dinner time to talk informally about each other's days;</li> <li>Using open questions to build trust and openness;</li> <li>Family game time;</li> <li>Normal bed time routine;</li> <li>No screens or phones in the bedroom;</li> <li>Family charges all phones downstairs (parents and older siblings set an example);</li> <li>Reading before bed to unwind;</li> <li>Share daily gratitude just before bedtime.</li> </ul>

#### Have you tried...?

- Focusing on being happy and calm: their education will survive - their mental and physical wellbeing is what is important;
- Daily nature walks with challenges along the way;
- New hobbies e.g. knitting, skills swaps with family/friends, frisbee, lego building;
- Balance: 'A Time for Togetherness' vs 'Me Time';
- Turning off Teams notifications at the weekend;
- Colour coded list: variety of tasks in each category, pick one colour each day;
- Daily 'express yourself' activity e.g. writing, drawing, painting, designing;
- Cultural enrichment e.g. learn a poem, watch a classic film;
- (Google) family calendar to coordinate activities;
- Emotional support – not setting the bar too high and talking to each other with kindness;
- Sharing confidence and trust in your child;
- If you are in need of specific support, reach out to your child's tutor in the first instance.

**Q: Having certainty about GCSE and A Level exams, mock exams and Teacher Assessed Grades would reduce everyone's anxiety levels. What information can you give us?**

We would love to be able to give you absolutely clear instructions about how it will all work, but the government have yet to provide full clarity on what the Teacher Assessed Grades process and expectations will be and consequently we are waiting for information, as you are. That being said, we do have some information that can hopefully help to provide some clarity.

Last year we went through a rigorous process of providing Centre Assessed Grades, much of which is likely to be required again this year. One key difference, that has been confirmed, is that the government have stated there will not be an algorithm applied to the grades produced by centres. That being said, the final guidance has not been published, so there may still be some form of oversight, such as ceilings on grade inflation relative to previous years etc.

It may be of use to provide you with an outline of our process last year, which will hopefully give a good idea of what may be required this year:

- 1. Class teachers used a range of data including mock exams, NEAs, topic tests, class work, Olympiads etc. to generate a ranking list of all students in that class.*
- 2. Where there was more than one class for that subject, Heads of Department used the data provided by class teachers to blend the class teachers' recommendations into a whole cohort ranking. This was a thorough and quality assured process, using benchmarked data to make distinctions between similar students.*
- 3. Every Head of Department met with the Deputy Headmaster or member of the Grade Calculation Team and in those meetings historic data was used as a baseline for making adjustments within an expected tolerance (an expected small percentage increase in outcomes from the previous year).*
- 4. Value Added Data and prior attainment was then used to identify any potential anomalies and adjustments made as a result.*
- 5. Full review of data by Deputy Headmaster and SENCO so any necessary additional considerations are taken into account.*
- 6. Deputy Headmaster and Grade Calculation Team present final recommendations to the Headmaster for scrutiny. Grades were then submitted.*

It is probable that something similar will have to be used this year too.

This year, we have already generated good data on students, using Collections at the start of the year in part to ensure that we had a formal examination with certainty about the data compiled from it, as well as a range of other assessments through the year. We have also made plans for formal mock exams to take place when the students return to in-school learning, as well as setting Online Interim Assessments at the start of this term. It has also been suggested that the government have asked Ofqual to get exam boards to provide schools with formal examination papers, which schools will mark to have further evidence for Teacher Assessed Grades. This has yet to be confirmed however.

One of the concerns that parents have raised is the reliability of online tests as a data point for TAGs, as they cannot be supervised. As a result, we have put in place the following provisions:

- 1. The tests have been designed to be open book and appropriate for the scenario. Staff created new purpose-built assessments with the online environment in mind and did not simply use existing tests.*
- 2. Many departments for whom it was appropriate used Socrative, or similar online assessment software, which meant the test was controlled and consequently more reliable.*
- 3. The results of these tests will be lightly weighted relative to formal in-school assessments and in many cases have been used for target setting in preparation for mock exams that will be used for TAG calculations.*

We are currently being told to prepare for a return to in-school teaching from March 8<sup>th</sup>, although this is subject to change. Once we have a confirmed date for the return to School, we will inform all Y11 and Y13 students of their mock exam topics (if appropriate to do so for the subject) and dates. We will be giving students a two-week notice of mock exams, so they have time to prepare. The hard work and revision they put in for the January exams will also mean they are well-prepared for in-school exams.

As we get confirmation of the government's final plans, we will communicate with parents and students directly and promptly.

#### Q: Why isn't every lesson live?

National research (by OFSTED and the EEF), our recent student survey and our staff experiences have shown a 'mixed model' of online delivery to be both most effective and most sustainable for everyone's wellbeing, especially as staff care for their own dependents. This involves a combination of live elements (teacher explanations and questioning), formative assessment tasks (quizzes and assignments) and asynchronous independent practice (time to apply their learning to exercises).

An excerpt from the OFSTED research: *"Some think that a live lesson is the 'gold standard' of remote education. This isn't necessarily the case. Live lessons have a lot of advantages. But live lessons are not always more effective than asynchronous approaches. There are some specific difficulties in doing live lessons. This means that giving feedback can actually be less effective than when we use recorded lesson segments followed by interactive chats, or tasks and feedback."*

We are clear that the quality of teaching is far more important than how lessons are delivered.

#### Q: Why are you persisting with staggered breaks/lunches and shorter lessons, when the students are safe at home?

For all of us, 'surviving' lockdown depends on achieving a balance between our wellbeing needs (which are different when we are isolated from one another), ensuring positive interactions at home (which are different when we have such extended lengths of time with each other) and our tasks, whether these are for employment, relate to the care of our families or are our studies.

We felt convinced in the first lockdown that providing space for activities which we can't deliver remotely – such as exercise and socialising, was best done by providing a timetable that ends slightly earlier, and which gave families and students more afternoon flexibility. We have nevertheless created a broad range of activities for afternoons, for those who continue to need this stimulation, and expect all staff to set challenge tasks which may involve independent work well beyond scheduled lesson time.

Compressing lesson time allows students and families a much clearer window to manage and 'juggle' their own needs. Feedback suggests that moving fairly swiftly between lessons and having a fuller, more flexible afternoon space may be preferable to staggering online learning throughout the day and limiting the time available for exercise etc. This is not to say that the model is perfect; rather it is a compromise designed to protect wellbeing for students, families and staff, and to ensure students get the maximum possible delivery of 'live' lessons.

In contrast to the first lockdown, we have embedded additional lesson time for Years 10-13 in the afternoons where these are deemed necessary and if any parent fears their son(s) are under occupied they should review the wide range of elective options for afternoons or raise a concern with their son's tutor.

Every parent should be able to see their son's timetable via the Bromcom app (My Child At School).

**Q: What is the School doing to ensure students do enough physical exercise and activities away from the screen?**

Current lockdown rules allow us all to leave the house once a day for exercise, and this is something all parents should be encouraging their children to do, whether for a walk, for other exercise or with a family member.

PE staff have delivered live lessons during curriculum time during the recent lockdown to give students the opportunity to take part in meaningful physical activity with their peers. In addition, the PE department has run a number of weekly activities during RW3 and RW4, both live and asynchronous.

The length of morning lessons and time spent on screen is balanced by time and space in the afternoons for students to contribute to a range of activities, but also to allow them space to exercise and get outside.

The consistent narrative has been to encourage students to stay active and to take responsibility for their wellbeing, by taking part in challenges and other activities with their peers and independently. Initiatives such as Mental Health Week's wellbeing challenges direct students towards balance and time off screen; in addition, a large number of the activities offered as part of the elective program involve practical or physical elements.

The Headmaster's most recent communication included the following information to help direct students towards opportunities for exercise:

- *In addition to taking part in live PE lessons and challenges set by the PE team, the PE department would like to encourage all students to be doing regular exercise in their free time and afternoons. Join one of the afternoon electives to stay active, to get fit and to connect with your peers and the Reading School community.*
- *Start the week with a fitness frenzy and join Mr Evans and Ed Roy for bootcamp: Monday @ 1400 in the **Fitness Boot Camp** team.*
- *Log your weekly runs and walks on Strava and try to join Mr Steadman's exclusive 1125 club: 4 students attained the 112.5 km weekly benchmark last week! Log any of your activity and take part in your own time: **Club – PE Department / Strava***
- *For the cyclists amongst you, join Mr Stromdale on the Deci-tour; can anyone keep up with Oliver Clement? Join in your own time '**Deci-Tour**' de France 2021 team.*
- *For weekly PE challenges watch up for our videos and challenges uploaded to the Reading school PE Twitter page: **@RSSportandPE**. Send Mr Allen your challenges, or videos of your best efforts!*
- *And if you just want to get out for your general health, join the **What Three Words** team at 1330 on a Thursday for a weekly walking challenge.*
- **Stay active, get fit & connect with your peers**

**Q: Everyone is missing their friends and classmates – what are you doing to mitigate this?**

Tutor time is used as a time to enable students to catch up with each other. Tutors have been creative in running a variety of different types of quizzes, competitions or topical discussions and tutors are receptive to student suggestions. The use of break out rooms for smaller group activities or challenges has also been both popular and effective. Tutors have had the capacity to have small group meetings, whole class time and facilitated important 1 to 1 talks with their tutees to check in on social interactions amongst peers.

Elective activities in the afternoons also enable interaction with friends from other classes or year groups. Based on your feedback, we are going to offer informal virtual happy hour electives as a time for students to catch up and set their own agenda. Details will be shared, and this will start after half term.

Due to safeguarding considerations and the effectiveness of lessons without cameras, we have not used other platforms such as ZOOM or enabled the video function of Teams. We will review this approach to consider whether there are specific situations where the benefits outweigh the risks/additional consent/guidance.

We also see the value of community events such as virtual assemblies, and as the term progresses will run them in a similar format to those at the end of the Autumn term. The Heads of House and their prefect teams are excited

to celebrate individual or group success, community initiatives such as each House supporting individual wards at the Royal Berkshire Hospital, or details about House competition events like Eisteddfod.

We are proud of how the students have managed their work on Teams and utilise the functionality of the platform but are aware that some need more guidance on the use of the chat function. There is a published guide of How to Communicate on Teams (an extract of it is pasted below) and along with this resource there have been periodic reminders given to the students via Teams, their tutors or in some cases contact with home to reinforce the importance of online classroom etiquette.

### How to communicate on Teams

*There are two golden rules to remember when using Teams:*

*1) Be kind*

*2) Only say what you would say in a normal classroom in front of your teacher.*

*Within your Team there may be some channels where you are able to post and some which are locked so that only your teacher can post in it.*

*Your subject Team is not a general message board – you can use it to talk to your teacher and other members of the class about the subject you are studying, but you should not go off topic or spam the message board. Your teacher will have set up a support channel where you can ask questions about tasks and content.*

*Some extra-curricular activities also have Teams, where you can chat with other students who share your interests.*

We also now have analysis of Teams usage by student and are supporting identified individuals who message beyond the expected threshold or do not engage with the online learning.

### **Q: How can I find out whether my son is progressing well in his studies, other than relying on him telling me?**

Microsoft Teams is the platform we use to deliver all our online learning. We would encourage you to familiarise yourself with your son's Teams – you will see each of your son's 'Teams' (subject classes) and then within each Team there may be several 'channels' e.g. 'Help' / 'Live Lessons'.

Many of your son's teachers will be setting his work using 'Assignments' - by clicking on the relevant tab on the left-hand side, you will be able to see every task he has been set, the instructions, deadline and any feedback (see image). By using the Teams mobile phone app (free), he can easily upload photos of his work to submit to his teacher. The same information can be found in each Team's General channel – click Assignments at the top.

Clicking on the 'Bell' (Activity) symbol on the left-hand side will show you all the notifications he has been sent – this will include assignments, lessons beginning and messages from teachers.

Please clarify with your child that Microsoft Teams by default sets Assignments to be 'due' at 11.59pm - this is obviously not the time that teachers expect students to be aiming for, but unfortunately is not something we can change.

If you are concerned about your son keeping track of his work, we would suggest you give him a rudimentary diary (Subject - Task – Deadline). Our attendance team monitor student attendance in lessons and you can see this on the MCAS app, where any sanctions for missed work would also be recorded.

You should be aware that 'feedback' on your son's progress will be delivered by staff in multiple methods, both as a necessity of online learning (we can't use red pens in their exercise books!), but also because of the proven effectiveness of whole class feedback on pieces of work, automatically-marked 'knowledge quiz' platforms (e.g. Forms, Carousel, Kahoot, Quizlet) and verbal feedback in class after questioning. Research shows that the most



important aspect of any feedback is what the student does as a result of the feedback they have been given, so please encourage your son to act upon the advice he will regularly have been given.

As well as reports and Parent's Evenings, where you are provided with whole year feedback and teachers request you to see them (where applicable), your son's tutor or Head of House will be in touch with you directly if they have any particular concerns.

In order to know what your son is currently studying and what is coming up next, please refer to the Curriculum Guides that are published on the School website:

[Years 7-8 Curriculum Guide](#)    [GCSE Curriculum Guide](#)    [Sixth Form Curriculum Guide](#)

Please can all parents ensure their son has (and uses!) a functioning microphone on their digital device, as this is crucial for full participation in lessons. The free headphones that come with mobile phones often include a microphone, or they can be purchased for under £10 from Amazon. Please contact [tevens@reading-school.co.uk](mailto:tevens@reading-school.co.uk) if finances are a barrier to having a microphone.