

24 March 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians

You will be very aware of all the issues we have been having with Firefly. The platform has let us down at our point of greatest need and it is only through your support and staff resilience, creativity and the use of zoom, that we have been able to deliver our programme of remote learning in the last two days. Thank you for continuing to send positive messages back to us.

It is looking increasingly likely that Firefly will be struggling for the remainder of this week - and possibly beyond - due to server allocation. At the moment Firefly is planning to allocate more resources for larger schools, before servicing the rest. The platform uses Amazon servers which are already under enormous pressure due to hosting Netflix streaming servers, and Netflix will undoubtedly be given priority over Firefly!

Moving forwards with remote learning, it is imperative that we have a reliable platform for lesson delivery. Remote learning is likely to be in place for a long period of time, so removing the daily uncertainty that we are currently facing is our top priority.

The plan we put in place, created in a very short time-frame, was well-suited to the school's needs and many aspects of it are working well. What we had no way of foreseeing was that Firefly would let us down in such a dramatic and prolonged way. In such hugely challenging times, we have therefore made the decision to transition to a new form of remote learning provision, with the first phase of this starting today.

**The plan is as follows:**

1. Zoom is working well and we will continue to embrace this technology. We will continue to use zoom to the fullest extent and take full advantage of all it has to offer our pupils. We are confident this is a robust, reliable tool. *Staff now have access to a paid-for version of Zoom.*
2. We must start to distance ourselves from Firefly and implement our back-up plan. This is to use every resource under **Microsoft office 365**, as it is robust and will keep up with the load. Microsoft Teams for Education appear to coping better than other platforms with the extra traffic and many schools are successfully using Microsoft

Teams for remote learning. Many of our staff have already made use of Office 365/SharePoint when Firefly has been down.

With the backing of the **Executive Leadership Team** and the **Chair of Governors**, we will today start to transition to the **Microsoft Teams platform**. During this transition, we need to understand what functionality Microsoft Teams offers and then link it to what staff, parents and pupils are currently using Firefly for.

This transition will be divided into a number of phases:

**Phase 1:** The first stage of this transition is to use the power of **SharePoint** – setting up shared areas for classes and sharing resources within these shared areas. This set up will be akin to how existing Firefly pages work, as a repository of files which are then shared with students. SharePoint areas offer storage space and act like a website offering a collection of materials. Students then dip into these resources.

**Phase 2:** Staff to explore further the use of **SharePoint directly inside Microsoft Teams** over the Easter break. Where necessary training will be provided for staff, pupils and parents.

**Phase 3: Use Microsoft Teams and Zoom** as the primary remote Learning Provision with all classes

Full details of this transition and what it will mean for pupils and parents will be published tomorrow morning and in the next 24 hours. The Leadership Team are currently working behind the scenes setting up Microsoft Teams in readiness. We always had this in reserve as a back-up, but we had not expected to have to implement it so soon. In the circumstances, I hope you will understand and appreciate the steps we are taking to avoid continued disruption to learning.

Please rest assured that we are not pulling the rug out from under families, just smoothing out a few wrinkles so the rug doesn't become a liability! We want to be in a position where we can provide effective provision in the short and long term. A small amount of further training for staff, pupils and parents now as we approach an extended break will pay dividends for all of us next term.

Many thanks for bearing with us at this challenging time.



Stephen Oliver  
Principal