

22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020

**Subject: Why aren't we offering live online lessons?**

Dear Parents/Carers

We are starting our third week operating as a virtual school. However hard we try, there is no substitute for students being in school and taught face-to-face. As a school, we have made the decision not to offer 'live' online lessons to students. I have had a few queries about why we aren't doing this. This is a good question, and the answer is not simple. Therefore, I felt it best to write and explain why we are not planning to do this, and what we are doing instead.

There are three main reasons why we are not planning to offer live online lessons:

**1. The lessons would not be accessible for many students**

As a comprehensive school, we educate young people from a variety of different backgrounds and home circumstances. Live online lessons require students to have access to a strong internet connection, their own computer and a quiet place to work for the whole day. This is not feasible for many of our students. A large number have brothers and sisters who also need access to IT, not to mention their parents who are trying to work from home. A significant number of our students could not access live online lessons.

**2. Live online learning could not be delivered by many teachers**

Many of our teachers do not have the ability to deliver live lessons from home. There are technical limitations, like poor internet connection or access to suitable equipment, and personal reasons, such as having their own children at home or not having a quiet space they can broadcast from.

Planning and delivering live online lessons would also stop teachers doing the other things we want them to do, like respond to student queries and provide pastoral support.

**3. There are better ways to learn at a distance**

Live online lessons are not widely considered to be the best way for young people to learn at home. Rather than replicate the classroom environment, all you really get is someone talking at students followed by them doing a task. There is little interaction. In countries where there have been school closures due to pandemics, there is evidence that students turn up to the lesson, but don't often pay attention or learn much. Live online lessons sound like they are going to be the next best thing to being in the classroom at school, but they are not.



What appears to be more effective is students being directed towards high quality tutorials, being set tasks that are pitched well, and supported remotely by teachers answering their questions and monitoring the work completed. Asking our teachers to deliver hours of live online lessons each day would stop them doing the things we know will be more effective in the long run.

There are national organisations who are rapidly creating video tutorials for schools to direct students to. One example is the Oak Academy (<https://www.thenational.academy/online-classroom>), which launched yesterday. The BBC have also launched a virtual school online and on i-player this week. These national solutions will provide a far higher quality learning experiences than any one school alone will be able to. Our teachers are exploring these resources and will begin to direct students to relevant 'teaching' modules.

**In summary, live online teaching is not that effective, inaccessible to many students, and stops teachers supporting students in other ways. This is why we have chosen not to teach live.**

Given all these problems, why are some schools delivering live online lessons?

Some private schools, those in large academy chains and schools in some other countries have started teaching live online lessons. How are they managing to do this?

It is much easier to deliver live online lessons if:

- You issue every student and every member of staff with their own laptop
- Your teachers teach a relatively light timetable
- You have lots of schools in your academy trust so you can pool your resources and have teams delivering lessons for multiple classes
- You have a financially advantaged intake who have plenty of access to IT and a quiet space to work.

**In most state schools, the above criteria do not apply. This is why most state secondary schools (other than those in large multi-academy trusts) are unable to deliver live online lessons, even if they wanted to.**

Will it get easier for my child to work at home?

The feedback we have received is that some children (and parents) find working at home more difficult than others. It is particularly difficult when students have learning difficulties, limited access to computers and a quiet place to work, and parents who are under pressure to manage their own work. We are very aware of these challenges and are developing our approach to make this as manageable as possible.

Please remember that we are new to this too. We have been teachers in a virtual school for two weeks. We are adjusting to completely new ways of working and have all the same problems that you are having with IT access, health worries and our own children who are struggling with the work they are being set! We want to do the best for your children during this difficult time – it is why we became teachers. However, it is going to take us a little while to be as good at this as we are at our usual day job.

Currently, our teachers are:

- Researching and exploring the new resources coming online

- Learning new skills, such as how to record voice-overs on PowerPoint and use online platforms
- Developing new ways to keep in touch with students and check they are okay
- Designing new resources for students which are more suitable for home working
- Piloting some online support sessions with older students
- Working out efficient ways to check student work and provide feedback.

This effort means that the quality of the work set will increase, and we will be able to provide better support for those that are struggling.

I hope this clarifies why we are doing what we are doing. These are unprecedented times and there is no substitute for students being in school, being taught face-to-face. In the meantime, we will do our very best for the students. Thank you for your many kind words of support and appreciation.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Evans', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Matthew Evans  
Headteacher