

17th February 2021

Update from the Headteacher

Dear Parent/Carer,

The Senior Leadership Team met this morning to finalise the different layers of support we want to be able to provide for all members of our school community following the sudden death of one of our much-loved students on Monday.

Whilst we must continue to be mindful of the important protocols in place to keep us safe whilst in lockdown, the current restrictions will not be a barrier to us being able to reach out, care for and support our young people, staff and you as parents at such a difficult time. To this end, please be reassured that we will continue to do everything possible to look after our young people through our day-to-day usual practice but also with the following additional layers of support in place:

- The sixth form team are in telephone contact with students in Year 12 this week and form tutors will continue to telephone all students in Year 12 next week to check in and catch up;
- From Monday, groups of up to 20 students in Year 12 will be able to 'book in' to a 'social support' session either from 10am – 12pm or 1.30pm to 3.30pm to be able to spend some time with members of their year group on site, have a cuppa and simply have some time and space to talk to each other in familiar surroundings;
- These 'social support' sessions will be bookable for all students in Year 12 from Wednesday of next week (Monday and Tuesday has been designated for those students who have already been contacted;)
- A team of professionals from Newport Mind, Newport Youth Service, Cruise Bereavement Service and Educational Psychologists will all be available to speak to anyone attending these 'social support' sessions should they wish to, either on their own or with a friend;
- Staff from Bassaleg will be on site each day to support and talk to students;
- Students (from any year group) affected by this tragedy can book an appointment to talk to a professional face-to-face on site; this service will be available from 9am to 3.30pm every day Monday to Friday. Should your child wish to book an appointment, please email woodmanh@bassalegschool.com
- A book of condolence will be available for pupils and staff to sign (based in the Griffin building) – students can do this when attending one of the 'social support sessions' on any given day;
- I will lead a pre-recorded virtual assembly address to all year groups on Monday, supported by Directors of Wellbeing and Senior staff who will signpost our young people to the variety of support strategies available to them and to also encourage them to look forward and set their minds to the positive experiences awaiting them this term;

- Parents/carers will be invited to a voluntary parent forum focussing on practical guidance to help you when discussing the topic of death or specifically suicide with your child; we will enlist the help of our friends at Newport Mind to provide you with an opportunity to see advice and ask any questions you may have;
- Staff will also continue to have full access to similar support strategies to ensure that we are in the strongest possible position to look after all of our young people; after all it is vital that we all put on our own oxygen mask first before we can help anyone else.

It was important to write to you today to both inform and reassure you of the comprehensive range of additional support available for all of our young people, following such a tragic event. It is also important that I reassure you of the appropriate 'balance' we will apply to this provision; some of our young people will very much want to step back into routine on Monday morning and not necessarily want to talk about recent events as they may be unaffected; this too is extremely 'normal.' Please trust us to get this balance right.

Here are some helpful tips from our pastoral support team:

- ✓ Try to be available. Your child may not be ready to speak when you are;
- ✓ Try to operate as normal but perhaps suggest an activity your child might enjoy? A game? A walk? Some baking? A film/ TV show? They can always say no!
- ✓ Children usually find it easier to speak when they are doing. You might also find this a useful way of keeping your child around you;
- ✓ Try to create a calm and loving environment;
- ✓ Try not to assume how they are feeling; it's okay to ask questions. Remind them that, however they're feeling, that's okay;
- ✓ When/ if your child does speak, thank them. Let them know you're grateful for them sharing their memories and thoughts/feelings;
- ✓ Please don't be offended if you are not the one they want to open up to; just try to be available;
- ✓ Children will often want to be with their friends- either to talk about their feelings or to be distracted by them;
- ✓ "Anger is an excellent mask for sadness" Remind yourself of this at difficult times;
- ✓ Whilst they may say they want to be alone, keep offering opportunities to do things together;
- ✓ Engaging with lessons will be a distraction so encourage it. But be patient and understanding if they're not ready. They are processing something really hard
- ✓ The Young Minds Website has a parents' helpline and lots of useful information <https://youngminds.org.uk/>
- ✓ Let them know how special and important they are. It will make you feel better too!
- ✓ What young people tell us they want: *'Normality, don't be sacred to talk to me or ask me questions.'* *'Distraction: Make me laugh and share your stories; ask me if I want to be involved in social activities – I can always say no.'*

I'll next be in touch with my usual weekly update on Friday 26th February but can I finally take this opportunity to thank so many of you for your kind words of support over the last couple of days; it has meant so much to receive such comforting words from you at what is a hugely sad time for the school community. As Headteacher, I appreciate your support and kindness so much.

Look after yourselves, look after each other.

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Victoria Lambe
Headteacher

