



14 October 2021

Dear Parents, Carers & Guardians,

I hope that this letter finds you all well. I am writing with a number of updates as we approach the end of the first half term of the academic year. While the first few updates are more practical, I would like to highlight the importance of the second section of this message which contains a series of safeguarding updates.

### **Changes to term dates**

As you may be aware, schools have been granted an additional bank holiday this academic year to commemorate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee. At NFS, we are therefore going to make some adjustments to our published term dates as follows:

- Students will return from the Christmas break on Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2022
- There will be an INSET day on Friday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2022
- The summer term will finish on Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2022

The dates have been updated on our website for your reference. If any of these changes present an issue regarding your child's attendance at school, please contact their tutor in the first instance.

### **New school day, directed study & extra-curricular activities**

Thank you to everyone for your support with our new arrangements. We appreciate that having a flexible start time requires more organisation on the part of students, but using a diary is an important life skill for them to develop. Please can I remind everyone of our student entry times:

For students attending directed study, the school gates are open from 8:10 to 8:25 a.m. For students not attending directed study, the school gates are open from 8:55 to 9:10 a.m. Students arriving after these times should enter school through the main entrance, but will be classed as late.

I am also delighted to say that extra-curricular activities have re-started. Please can you stress to your child that it is their responsibility to communicate with you regarding their attendance at an afterschool activity. Students should be using their diary to record when they have an afterschool activity, and when they should attend directed study.

### **Homework & work for students who are self-isolating**

This year we have started to expand our use of the Bromcom system, and we are now using the Student Portal as our platform for homework. We will also be using the Student Portal to set work for students who are isolating due to COVID-19. Please note, although you are able to see the details of the homework within your MCAS account, you will not have access to attachments or submission details, which could require students to upload back to the teacher. Therefore, it is essential that students can log in to their Student Portal account, in order to access all the information set by their teachers. Tutors have been working hard this

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half term to ensure all their tutees have access, therefore if your child still cannot log in to their account, please email their details, including their tutor group, to [contact@nottinghamfreeschool.co.uk](mailto:contact@nottinghamfreeschool.co.uk) and mark the subject of the email as 'Student Portal Access'.

### **The AIM Group**

Last year we promoted the AIM group, who offer a wide range of fully funded level 2 courses. I would just like to take this opportunity to reiterate what an amazing offer this is, and recommend that everyone has a look at their website for more information: [theaimgroup.co.uk](http://theaimgroup.co.uk)

### **A safeguarding update for parents, carers and guardians: keeping our students safe from harmful sexual behaviours**

Towards the end of last academic year there was a national focus on harmful sexual behaviours, triggered by the 'Everyone's Involved' campaign. Ofsted were commissioned to explore the prevalence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment and sexual violence in the lives of school children. Ofsted published its findings in June 2021 and set out a number of recommendations for schools, which we have been implementing. There were assemblies for all students at the end of the summer term and at the start of this term, to raise the profile of these issues and ensure everyone understood their responsibilities as part of our school community. Some initial student panels have helped us to construct a realistic picture of their day-to-day experiences, and staff have received additional training during INSET.

### **Lessons and activities this year**

Our personal development curriculum is a vital strand of our students' wider education at NFS. Our core values of hard work and kindness are central to the messages covered in our Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum. We have adjusted our plans for tutor activities, assemblies and RSE lessons to ensure that all students are taught about their shared responsibility to look after themselves, their friends and their peers. Harmful behaviours that some sections of the media have referred to as 'banter' are not acceptable at NFS. Such behaviours would warrant serious sanctions, including the potential for exclusion from school.

### **What can parents, carers and guardians do to support their children?**

Arguably, the area of children's lives that is most difficult for schools to influence is their 'online' activity. Unfortunately, this is where a significant proportion of harmful sexual behaviours take place between peers. This is also where families can play a vital role in keeping children safe. Ensuring that children adhere to social media age limits, appropriate privacy settings and codes of conduct can be done at home, and it helps children understand their responsibilities online.

In order to help families keep their children safe online, we are in the process of investing in a package from National Online Safety. We will contact you again after half term with guidance as to how you can access this package of support.

**The most important message for students: if you are unhappy, talk to someone!**

At NFS we have a team of safeguarding staff who appear on posters around the school, and feature in our safeguarding assemblies for students. However, our students should also know that should they feel uncomfortable about an incident or pattern of behaviour from one of their peers, they can approach any member of staff they feel comfortable talking to. The key message for students is that it is always best to talk to someone.

**Message from the Department for Education**

That brings the messages from NFS to a close, apart from my sincere thanks to everyone in our community for their ongoing support. The final piece of information I would like to draw your attention to is the attached letter from the DfE regarding COVID-19 and young people in England.

Regards.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Watts', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Watts  
Head of School