Dear 3rd year parent,

We hope you and your daughter are keeping well and doing your best to embrace this new way of living and learning that we all find ourselves in.

As your daughter’s year head, we are contacting you today to update you on developments related to distance learning.  This has been a difficult and challenging time for us as educators but particularly for your daughter as she embraces on line, distant learning. The teachers have been working hard to facilitate this independent learning and like everyone are facing many challenges.

Luckily for us in Loreto Balbriggan we were at the fore front of on line teaching and learning and independent learning prior to the onset of Covid 19 and the imminent shut down of schools. Indeed, we had an independent learning committee active in the school and your daughter would be very familiar with the idea of independent learning. Indeed, the pedagogy of John Dewey (an education theorist) suggests that “giving students the opportunities to discover for themselves and to develop as active and independent learners” is central to a good education.

Most subjects had their own Google classroom set up and were actively engaging with it prior to the shutdown. Thankfully every student in the school had their own personal school email account also. All of these initiatives that Loreto Balbriggan had in place has certainly eased the transition to on line distant learning. That said we are facing challenges that as a staff we are dealing with on a daily basis through regular staff meetings, department meetings, year head meetings and pastoral care meetings to name but a few.

Your daughters were asked for feedback recently and all of their concerns and suggestions are being taken on board.  We have also heard from a number of parents and we hope that this letter responds to some of those concerns.

Firstly, can we draw your attention to our classroom supports on the GSuite for Education, namely Emotional Supports and Study tips.  Your daughters were invited to join these classrooms in recent weeks.  There are many helpful suggestions and links included in both.  New material is being uploaded every couple of days so perhaps your daughter should log in on a regular basis.  You as a parent may like to view this material and I’m sure your daughter will be happy to show you how to access it.

Unfortunately, we were in the process of updating our website just before school closure and therefore we were unable to use it as we would have liked.  In the next couple of days we hope to have a dedicated Covid- 19 page which will have all communications and updates relating to the current situation available.  In addition, we are currently investigating the use of other social media platforms to facilitate broader communication.

For your own knowledge Ms Ward and Ms Mc Fadden as 3rd yr, Year Heads have been making contact with the entire year group on a regular basis and students are free to initiate contact with them as they need.

Just as we all have varied learning styles our teachers too use different methods and approaches to teaching.  Our teachers are balancing family commitments with their teaching.  There are some staff members with small children, elderly parents and may themselves be unwell therefore it is difficult to commit to a specific timetable.

Please be assured they are doing their absolute best and are in regular contact with their students.

We would like to bring to your attention the announcement from Minister Mc Hugh that addresses the Junior Certificate examination. All Junior Certificate students of 2020 will be awarded an official Junior Certificate in September 2020. We look forward to presenting your daughter with her Junior Certificate. The Minister for Education as directed by his department has also suggested that schools will have autonomy to assess their students in order to acknowledge their work for the last three years.

With this in mind, as a staff we feel that your daughters wonderful work and commitment to her studies during the last three years should be acknowledged by the school. Therefore, we are awarding your daughter a cumulative grade based on her first-year summer exam, second year Christmas and summer exam, third year Christmas exam and her Mock examination result in term two of third year. This will account for a total of eighty percent of her school report. The other twenty percent will be awarded based on your daughter’s engagement with her studies both prior to and during our school closure. This will also involve a small on line piece of work that each subject teacher will design and upload for your daughter.

As a staff and after much consultation we feel this is the fairest and best possible outcome for your daughter during these unprecedented times in Irish education. At the heart of every decision we as a Loreto school have made to date has been with your daughter and her education at the core. We hope you agree with our decision to acknowledge the past three years of your daughter’s education in Loreto Balbriggan.

Finally, we are passing on any and all official notifications we get from the Department but the schools are not getting information ahead of what is posted through reliable media sources.  Of course, the situation continues to change.

I trust this answers some of your questions and alleviates some of your concerns.  Please be assured that your daughter’s wellbeing and education is of the upmost concern to us in Loreto Balbriggan.  Everything we strive to do in Loreto, Balbriggan is to help all students achieve their potential. We are available to help in any way possible.  If you have any other suggestions or ideas please let us know.

In the meantime stay safe.

Ms. Mc Fadden

Ms Ward