Back in September, the DfE instructed schools to prepare remote learning for the implementation of a rota system, with different year groups were to be out of school for a fortnight at a time. At that point teachers were teaching a full timetable but it was a legal requirement that remote learning for year groups was produced, as well as providing remote learning for individuals who had to self -isolate. On this basis, we produced pre-recorded lessons which go into operation with immediate effect when required.

As always at Shenfield High School we always evaluate and learn from our practice. It was clear from our analytics during the first lockdown that students accessed the lessons at all times of day and night. We also noticed that on average students watched only between 5-7 minutes of the lesson video. Many different types of device were used, ranging from mobile phones to desktops computers.

This informed our strategy for remote learning from September. The key principles being:

* Continue with pre-recorded lessons so families had the flexibility to complete them at any time that is achievable or convenient for each family circumstance.
* Respond to students’ study habits by creating shorter pre-recorded lessons with knowledge delivered in the first 10 minutes, and with a task to consolidate understanding.
* The content itself should consolidate previous learning or introduce a new topic that could be followed up in school.
* Use Planet e-Steam which gives us information on which students have logged in, which lessons they have watched and for how long. Teachers can also see any answers they gave during live quizzes.

The remote learning we put in place was never designed to be for longer, more sustained lockdown periods. It was built on the basis that students would have two weeks of remote learning followed by two weeks in school to consolidate, address misconceptions, build upon and be assessed in lessons.

Shenfield High School, unlike many schools across the country, was fortunate in having the school in operation full-time for the majority of the autumn term. It was only in the final few weeks that we had to isolate year groups based on positive tests. Therefore, our students have been fortunate to have the very best that we have to offer: a teacher, in a classroom, with all the resources needed to deliver outstanding learning.

The Government has been clear throughout this pandemic that it wishes to keep schools open at all costs - even when tiers and risks increased - including threatening legal action in areas such as Greenwich if schools took the decision to close based on their local context

On Sunday this week, the Prime Minister stated that schools are safe places and that all schools would have a phased return with all year groups back in school by the 18th January. The DfE sent us thousands of Covid testing kits and ran webinars over the Christmas break to prepare for the full-time return of students.

On Monday, the Prime Minister announced that all schools would be closed until February half-term, at the earliest. He also explained that examinations would be cancelled.

On Tuesday, we started planning for this very different directive, building remote learning that would be suitable for long-term absence from school – a very different prospect from a short, sharp burst of two weeks. In the meantime, through diligent planning and hardworking staff, we were able to release remote learning in the form of pre-recorded lessons to all year groups and qualifications on our first day back at work, the 4th January.

After careful consideration of our staff availability, number of key worker and vulnerable students who are still in school, available resources and new remote learning guidance from the DfE, we have reviewed our current provision and plan to change our offer for the weeks, and potentially months, ahead.

From the 18th January, Key Stage 4 students will be given blended remote learning, each day. This will include:

* **A majority of their timetable will be ‘Live’ Lessons** – This will follow their personalised option choices with a specialist teacher through Microsoft Teams. The lessons will work in the same way as the pre-recorded lessons, but with opportunity to ask questions through the chat function. The lessons will be recorded so any students unable to attend will be able to access the lesson at a different time. For assignments, teacher marking and feedback will be appropriate to the needs of the subject and in accordance with departmental policies.
* **Some Directed Independent Study Hours** – The lessons that will not be ‘live’ will have directed tasks and assignments to complete and hand-in. We felt it was important that students are not overloaded with extra work, especially if digital resources at home are shared.
* **Some Pre-Recorded Lessons** – There may be occasions where a teacher is unable to teach ‘live’ or feel that a pre-recorded lesson would be more effective for that particular topic. This will be set on Teams and will be tracked to ensure that it has been watched by every student.
* **Study Periods continue** – KS5 relies on students being independent and continuing their learning between lessons. We would expect this practice to continue.

This offer far exceeds the DfE Guidance and will give the right balance for our students to remain motivated, feel supported and still allow the flexibility that so many families have appreciated about our approach so far.

We believe that it is very important that there is a clear understanding on the ‘live’ lessons versus pre-recorded lessons debate.

‘Live’ Lessons are:

* The same in terms of content, presentation and tasks set that would be delivered during a pre-recorded lesson.
* Not a chance for students to socialise, or even see their friends, because the expectation is that all cameras and microphones will be switched off throughout.
* Not a silver bullet that will dramatically change student engagement with home learning.
* Not a way for teachers to supervise students or keep them all on task. Instead, it is another form of remote learning that requires students to approach their studies with some maturity and parents to ensure they are focussing on the lesson if they have capacity to do so.

Pre-Recorded Lessons are:

* More creative, better sequenced and allow for students to pause, re-watch and re-visit explanations from previous lessons.
* More structured and timely as they will not have ‘live’ technical difficulties to deal with on the teacher or student machines.
* Better for us to track engagement through Planet e-Stream.

I think we can all agree that there is no perfect solution to remote learning. We know that students learn best in school with their teachers and friends. We can also agree that our best teachers are not considered so because they can do a whizzy PowerPoint presentation or have excellent IT skills. They are great teachers because of their expert subject knowledge, personality and excellent relationships with our students.

We understand the anxieties of parents around ‘lost learning’ and want to assure you that we are providing the very best offer we can to ensure we support all members of our school community through the most challenging of times. Our teachers are working beyond capacity to provide high quality, long-term remote learning for over 1400 students in our school, over seven year groups and multiple qualifications.

Next week you will receive the final remote learning timetable in its current format and later in the week, you will receive the new format to commence on **Monday 18th January**.

I would just like to thank all those parents who have supported every decision we have made since March last year. Your understanding of the situation and reassurance you have given us through phone call, tweets, letters and emails has provided confidence and strength to our wonderfully hardworking staff.

It is vital that we work together to remain positive, supportive and resilient for the good of our students and their learning.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Sands

Deputy Headteacher