

## **Elizabethan Academy during the Covid Pandemic**

There is a quote that states *“it’s sad that bad things have to happen for us to stop and look around”*. This pandemic has certainly reminded us at the Elizabethan, of the vital role of schools in the communities they serve and what is really important in the education of our students. I have always believed that schools are there to serve their communities and I am proud that our response to this pandemic has confirmed us as an integral part of it.

### **Stage 1 - Crisis centre and the academy**

In March, when we went into lockdown, I remember thinking that the academy no longer felt like a school but more like a crisis centre. Our immediate response was to remain open throughout the pandemic, for the children of key workers and vulnerable children, including during the Easter holidays and May half term. Staff and students wanted to know what they could do to support the NHS, so our enterprising Design Faculty immediately started producing PPE. Staff, supported by some students, worked around the clock making and delivering equipment, not only to our local hospitals, care homes and hospices but also into Derbyshire and Yorkshire. Despite information from the government predicting forthcoming PPE, we were still delivering PPE, including to primary schools, throughout June. Even this month a Design and Technology teacher supplied a colleague, at short notice, with PPE so she could be with her mother in a care home at end of life. These are the individual acts of human kindness which I will remember from this crisis and the acts which make us humane. During this time, we produced and delivered in the region of 3,000 number masks, washbags and aprons, gloves and 80 comfort hearts. I am extremely proud and humbled by my staff response and the immense gratitude we received from the community. It was a huge privilege to go to care homes and hospitals and thank the staff there personally, whilst delivering the PPE because they are the real heroes in all of this.



Year 8 student Szymon Rodzick at work in the DT rooms

When the sheer volume of laser cutting caused our aged laser cutter to fail, support came flooding in from the community and from parents in our bid to get a replacement. We will be eternally grateful that EDF Energy responded and donated a new machine which enabled us to treble our daily production of PPE.



Staff members Mrs Winfrey and Mr Clark preparing school meal deliveries

During this time, we were still setting and marking work on-line and phoning students and parents as well as ensuring all parents, students and staff were kept up to date on school developments with regular information Bulletins. The academy minibus and car became the delivery vehicles for over 10,000 school meals to in excess of 100 families. We also delivered and collected work to mark from families who didn't have access to technology. The academy is certainly richer for the relationships we

have forged with these families. Although the majority of students were engaging with the work set or coming into the academy, we knew from speaking to students and parents that what students needed was to actually see their teachers and their peers...welcome Microsoft Teams!

## Stage 2 - Delivering live lessons

It was incredible how within a matter of weeks, we went from delivering limited on-line lessons to delivering lessons to every year in every curriculum area. Students, although hesitant at first, were soon answering questions and enjoying the camaraderie of these shared lessons.

Throughout this stage we have also continued to deliver a diverse curriculum to our Key Worker and Vulnerable students from History Lessons on a range of topics; new languages skills in the form of Italian; discussion on current events and exploration of why "Black Live Matter" in Film Studies. Students have also developed independence through cooking lessons.



Year 7 Student Ben Merrills busy making cakes for an afternoon tea event

### Stage 3 - Get everyone back in the building

In the last few weeks, we have focused on getting more and more students back in the building, including all Year 10 students and Year 12 students. We are painfully



Students arrive for their daily morning briefing

aware that transition for both Sixth Form and Year 6 students has not happened as we had planned. Our new Sixth Form students have had on-line A level lessons for subjects they have chosen, and we have a transition week planned for the Year 6 students, who are coming to us, at the end of August. In the meantime, we have completed Microsoft Teams sessions with students and parents. Year 11 students have missed so many of the traditional celebrations, which, we tried to address through on-line end of year assemblies, phone calls to every student from senior leaders, plus hoodies and year books and we have further events planned for the autumn term. We have also arranged for students to come into the academy safely to collect their results and access support and careers guidance from staff.

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Mr Greenwood leading a group cycling activity

At the end of July, we have a summer school for Year 7 and Year 8 and the last three days of term were dedicated to activities, with the students in the academy which even included a sports day.

#### **Stage 4 September the future and what have we learnt?**

More recently, we have focused on getting everything planned so we can get all students back in the building working in “bubbles” and we cannot wait!

This crisis has, for me, demonstrated the values which have been long established in the academy. We are all immensely proud of this response and are looking to build on it. I have frequently stated my belief in the need for courageous and ethical



A Level Photography students participate in a 'socially Distanced' photoshoot

leadership in education. I do believe now is the time for a change in education, where schools are not judged on data (which can be manipulated, by unethical practices of selecting and excluding students). We are an inclusive academy, which values education in its broadest sense. Yes, good qualifications are vital for all students in terms of next steps and we have many students achieving excellent results, but we must not let the performance tables determine what is right for individual students. Elizabethan staff and our new recruits choose to work here because of our values and integrity. I believe we must now push the agenda regarding the “forgotten third” i.e. those students who do not achieve level 4 at GCSE. We must ensure they secure qualifications which provide them with a pathway and does not make them feel failures at the age of 16, even if the qualifications do

not count in performance tables. We must be courageous in putting students and staff wellbeing at the forefront of what we do. Ofsted have stated they will look at schools' response to Covid-19 in the autumn term and also focus on student wellbeing. If this is the case, I am confident we will be a model. We must believe that our holistic approach is right for our young people, their futures and this country's future.