1:1 Student Device Scheme and further support in catching up

Dear Parent/Carer,

We are writing to give you an update on our progress with the blended learning projects and virtual learning platform.

We are pleased to announce that the online ordering portal is now live for those families that have decided to purchase laptops in this way. Details are at the bottom of this letter. However, we also need to inform you that the nationwide demand for laptops is very high and there is currently a shortage of the Lenovo devices that are being offered through the lease-purchase scheme. Because of this, our scheme provider – Stone – are facing delays sourcing the number of devices to meet demand.

Due to this delay in availability we have been able to extend the “onboarding process” to Friday 23rd October (or the beginning of the half-term holiday). During this time, we will organise weekly sessions where students will be supported with the setup of their laptop and shown the basics of how to use them.

Throughout the first half term we will be ensuring that all students are familiar with Kingsmead’s new virtual ‘online classroom’. This is a new tool that all students, staff and parents will have access to regardless of taking part in the laptop purchase scheme. The virtual online classroom allows students, staff and parents to access thousands of on-line resources created by Kingsmead staff to support independent study and classroom learning. Students will be able to access the schemes of learning and subject specific learning journeys, which will tell them what they will be studying in school over the next 12 months. They will also have access to support materials to allow them to develop their understanding and resources to allow them to test understanding and practice exam questions.

These resources will be used in classroom lessons, home learning and independent study (in the event of a second spike or local spike caused by the Coronavirus). Many of the strategies and materials included in the online classroom have been created by Kingsmead’s subject specialist staff during the lockdown. We have been able to use the best practice discovered during this difficult time, to design a learning platform that works for our students.

During the first half term students can bring in their device from home, if they have one, and start to get used to the virtual learning platform that staff have created. Using the school computer suites and the limited number of devices that we have in school, all students will be able to explore the resource at school and at home. There will be no requirement for students to have a device, but equally those that choose to bring them will be able to continue to utilise the independent study skills built during lock down.

Closing gaps that have developed

The latest guidance from the government states that they are expecting all students in Year 11 and 10 next year to undertake examinations for GCSE’s. The GCSE’s in year 2021 will have small changes made because of the time and teaching that the students have missed. The government have also published advice on how schools can help students to catch up the gaps that have developed during the pandemic.
How we are planning to support students next year:

- We have extending the teaching day to include a P6 in year 11
- We offer Saturday School focussed on closing gaps
- We have timetabled extra classes in English, Mathematics and Science for those who need the extra support
- We have created a well-being and personal development programme to support student’s emotional well-being
- We have planned holiday booster sessions at all half terms and Easter school
- Staff have created a virtual learning platform that allows students to work independently when they choose / need to
- We are maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum in all year groups with specialist teachers in specialist rooms
- We have adjusted the curriculum to focus on key building blocks that are needed from KS2 and KS3 (You will see these changes on the curriculum journeys and in the schemes of learning)
- We are planning early testing to ensure that we all understand where the gaps in understanding are and can plan to help the students to catch up
- We have provided Summer School for the first 2 weeks of the Summer holiday to help some students re-engage with school
- We have invested all of the school’s ICT budget for the next 12 months in buying laptops for students to borrow if needed
- We have ensured that the whole school is Wi-Fi capable

What options do I have for my child to have a device they can use with blended learning and the virtual learning platform?

1 - Leasing Scheme

First and foremost, you can access the online ordering portal for our leasing scheme via a link on the school website at:

https://www.kingsmeadschool.net/home/student-device-proposal-and-blended-learning/

The details to log into the portal are also on this page. The portal is straightforward – you can choose from one of the two models discussed in previous letters and choose a payment plan. If you have any problems using the portal please contact FreedomTech (the leasing company) as they have control over the portal, not Kingsmead. Contact details can be found on the portal.

Please note that the portal will be open until Thursday 10th September and we cannot accept further orders through this scheme after this point (although we may look at reopening the portal at a later date if there is sufficient demand).

2 - Buying outright through Kingsmead

Through some negotiation, Kingsmead has also brokered a deal with another company to be able to supply the base laptop model to parents directly at a cheaper than high street price. The company is Computacentre, a large IT corporation which the government have also used recently for their scheme to provide laptops to students during the Covid-19 lockdown. The model of laptop on offer is identical to the one offered via the Stone/FreedomTech portal, but with more storage space, and costs £275.45. The caveat to this offer is that it does not come with the three-year warranty, accidental damage/theft
insurance, 24-hour replacement etc that the device under the leasing scheme does, so you may need to take out extra home insurance on the device yourself if you wish it to be covered for these things.

If you are interested in this option, you will see the option to purchase in ParentPay under “Other Items” when you log in. We will be accepting orders until Thursday 10th September (much like the leasing scheme), at which point we will place the order with the company.

3- Purchasing yourself

If you feel you are not happy with either of these options, then you are welcome to purchase a device yourself from one of the many high-street or online retailers. As we have communicated in past letters, we believe a Windows laptop is the ideal device to use. It is important to ensure the device you choose meets the needs of your child in Kingsmead, so with that in mind we would recommend the following specifications as a minimum when shopping. We’ve included an example specification for both a “base” and an “enhanced” laptop, similar to the offerings in the lease purchase scheme:

**Base:**
- CPU: Intel Celeron N4000 or better (or AMD A6-9225 or better)
- RAM: 4GB
- Storage: 64 GB (SSD or eMMC – SSD preferred, but **NOT** HDD)
- OS: Windows 10

**Enhanced:**
- CPU: Intel eighth generation i5 or better (eg i5-8250)
- RAM: 8GB
- Storage: 240GB (SSD, **NOT** HDD)
- OS: Windows 10

Either of these specifications will work for the purposes of Blended Learning – the enhanced spec will simply be a little quicker.

You may find some devices have “Windows 10 S” – this is a version of Windows that will **only** allow you to install software from the Windows Store. You can buy these devices (and in fact one of our examples below uses it), but if you want to install the copy of Microsoft Office on them that comes with your students school user account, you will need to switch it out to the normal Windows experience. Instructions for this can be found here:


Below we have listed a couple of examples of laptops that would be suitable at both the base and enhanced specification – prices are correct at the time of this letter being produced:

**Base spec:**
- Asus VivoBook Intel Celeron N4000 4GB 64GB SSD 11.6 Inch Windows 10 S Home Laptop
  [https://www.laptopsdirect.co.uk/-e203ma-fd017ts/version.asp](https://www.laptopsdirect.co.uk/-e203ma-fd017ts/version.asp) - £229.97

**Enhanced spec:**
- Lenovo V15-IIL Core i5-1035U 8GB 256GB SSD 15.6 Inch FHD Windows 10 Laptop
Do note that although we’ve recommended a Lenovo device above, there shouldn’t be a delay unless the website says as much – the delays our suppliers face are because they’re buying in very large numbers at once.

Bear in mind that these are only examples, and we fully recommend you shop around to find a price and specification that suits you and your budget. A few examples of places you can look online are listed below. These are just suggestions, and Kingsmead has no financial or other interest in these companies:

- Laptopsdirect.co.uk
- Amazon.co.uk
- Ebuyer.co.uk
- Cclonline.com
- Argos.co.uk
- Currys.co.uk

Although we do recommend a Windows-based device, we are not about to stop any child using a different device such as a tablet or MacBook. However, we do have some recommendations in this area:

**Tablets**

A tablet (whether an iPad or an Android-based device) should also include a Bluetooth keyboard so the student can type normally as they would at a PC, and should be a relatively recent model – for an Apple iOS-based device, it should be at least iOS version 12, and for Android version 6 (AKA ‘Marshmallow’).

**MacBook**

A MacBook is a capable device, but like most Apple products is also more expensive than an equivalent Windows-based device. Do bear in mind that replacement in the event of damage or theft will cost more, and the cost of insuring it on your home insurance may therefore be higher.

Also, please be aware that some applications (such as Microsoft Publisher) are not available on tablets or Mac-based devices.

Finally, do be aware that for any privately-purchased device, IT Support in school can only effect a “best-effort” service – we are happy to try to resolve problems, but if there is a hardware issue (e.g. a broken keyboard or screen, faulty power cable etc), then the responsibility of resolving this with the company that made the device will be with yourself. Any laptops bought via the leasing scheme, however, will be entirely handled through the school.

**Student Discounts**

Students who are aged 16 or over – regardless of whether they are in Year 11 or Sixth Form – are eligible for student discount schemes. The two main examples of these are:

- UNiDAYS - https://www.myunidays.com/
- StudentBeans - https://www.studentbeans.com/uk

Both of these schemes are free to join, and once joined you can search for discounts on either brands or shops. As the offers change frequently, we cannot recommend one or the other, but as they are free to join, it is worth checking both sites.
We firmly believe that the introduction of student laptops from September will bring enormous educational benefits, ensuring that our children are well prepared for the digital world of work and help to close gaps in learning created by the ongoing pandemic.

Once again, we wish to thank you for your continued support of the school in this matter and for the incredible achievements you have made at home, ensuring that your child’s learning continues.

Yours faithfully,

Mrs M Mincher
Head of School