

13th March 2020

Dear parents and carers,

You will all no doubt be watching with interest the Government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak and the increasing likelihood that the virus will become more prevalent. As a trust, we are monitoring the situation closely across all our schools and are acting on the advice of the Department for Education and Public Health England.

The Government was clear in their announcement yesterday that they do not expect schools to close though clearly this is constantly under review. In light of the possibility that schools may have to close, if and when cases are confirmed, we have asked our schools to consider how we might continue the education of your children in these circumstances. In the event of school closures, our expectation is that staff will continue to work remotely, setting work for children to complete and, where possible, providing feedback to students.

It may be that there is little notice period for school closure, and it is also possible that individual schools will be asked to close for short periods of up to 48 hours following a positive diagnosis of COVID-19 in order to carry out a deep clean of the premises. In addition, if more people have to self-isolate we may face reductions in staff numbers and we may need to close a year group (or year groups) on a particular day based on the staffing available. Alternatively, as we have seen in Italy and China, it may be that during the coming weeks the Department of Education will enforce more lengthy closures across the whole education system.

I have been working closely with headteachers to look at scenarios of staff working remotely and discussed contingency plans for this to be carried out effectively. In our secondary schools we will expect teachers to prioritise the teaching of years 11 and 13 in the lead up to the public examinations. Staff are already planning ahead for this eventuality in order to minimise disruption to students and to ensure that exam preparations can continue. It may be that students in non examination years, in primary schools and where access to IT is restricted, longer term projects are set which can be completed at home and we have asked our staff to consider how this may be done.

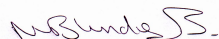
It is likely that staff will need to set work via school websites or VLE systems. Your school will be in touch with full details of the plans for communications if a school closure is necessary. They will also set out the specific processes for setting work for students if this should happen. Clear communication will be critical and so I ask all parents to ensure that their contact details, specifically email and phone numbers, are up to date in the event that your school needs to make contact at short notice.

We realise that this is an unsettling time but please be reassured that the welfare and safeguarding of all staff, students and our wider community is at the forefront of our decisions. We sincerely hope that we will not be required to close any of our schools and clearly this is an unprecedented challenge for the school system. However, it is important that we continue to listen to advice and prepare for every eventuality. We will keep you updated over the coming days and weeks.

Many thanks for your continued support at this time of relative uncertainty. Your schools will be in contact with further information but if you have any general queries please do get in touch with your school directly. In addition, some key contacts are below in case useful:

- 1) The Department for Education coronavirus helpline is available to answer questions about COVID-19 relating to education and children's social care. Staff, parents and young people can contact this helpline as follows:  
Phone: 0800 046 8687  
Email: [DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk](mailto:DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk)  
Opening hours: 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday)
- 2) Update on COVID-19 <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>
- 3) Travel advice for those travelling and living overseas:  
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/travel-advice-novel-coronavirus>
- 4) Short NHS films for guidance and to teach young children how to wash their hands:  
<https://youtu.be/bQCP7waTRWU>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9VjeIWLnEg>

Yours faithfully,



Neil Blundell

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