

Thursday 2nd April

Dear Parents and Carers,

This has been a term and a start to a year like no other, not just in my 27 years in education but in most people's living memory. Within the last two weeks we have closed all of our schools, except to the families of key workers and those students who require significant care, and set up a whole new way of teaching and learning remotely. There has been considerable uncertainty and we have all had to adapt to a new way of living. Leaders, teachers and support staff in all of our schools and across the central team have worked incredibly hard to continue to support our children and I know that you will join me in thanking them for all that they have achieved over the last couple of weeks. It will take some considerable time for us to adapt and work through all of the challenges, some of which we haven't yet considered, as the situation continues to evolve.

Thank you also to all students, parents and carers for their ongoing support and effort in adapting to the new environment and for listening carefully to the government guidelines and keeping your children at home wherever possible. We still do not know when schools will reopen but we will do all we can to support students and their families and ensure that learning continues. Please do get in contact with your school directly if you have any particular feedback, suggestions or ideas - we would love to hear from you.

We are not expecting our teachers to set or mark work over the Easter holidays, although the concept of 'holiday' remains somewhat unclear for everyone. It will be important however that both staff and children take some form of break from schoolwork. Our schools will remain open for children of key workers and those who require significant care even on the bank holidays and leaders will be in touch with those parents before the holidays to gauge demand. We recommend that you look at the work provided by your school and, where possible, support your children with a longer term project over the holiday period. This will help to keep some form of structure, promoting positive mental health by allowing time for exercise and, of course, rest and relaxation. As we get used to this type of education we will need to think about what has gone well and what needs to develop. Schools teachers and leaders will need time to prepare and adapt resources and it will be more important than ever for departments to spend time on this. Your schools will let you know when this is happening and this may mean that there are delays in the setting or marking of work for your child. We also know that continued online education is more difficult for some teachers and children's experience of learning from home will vary

significantly. Some of our teachers also have commitments in school and some have key workers in their family or young children to care for at home. Please be patient and let your schools know about your child's experience by getting in touch directly with the school in the first instance.

Now, more than ever, it is crucial that all schools maintain their high standards of governance and that the governance structures for each school are able to offer their support. Rest assured that all schools within the Trust will continue to regularly feedback to their individual governing bodies and Local Governing Body meetings will continue as planned, albeit remotely at the moment. The Board of Trustees for Cathedral Schools Trust met last week to discuss a revised risk register and to consider some adjusted strategic targets given the current situation. Trustees have asked me to reassure parents that they will continue to monitor, challenge, support and listen throughout the school closure period. In early March we invited the governors from all seven schools to meet with trustees, members, and the central team to discuss our strategic ambitions. We were delighted with the turnout of over 50 governors from all of our schools.



It is also important to celebrate the many other events and activities that have taken place this term and not lose sight of all that our schools have achieved. Some highlights for me this term include Earth Week which was celebrated by six schools across the trust, giving children an opportunity to share their work on sustainability and environmental issues. The week

culminated in an Eco Summit at City Hall where our pupils were joined by Councillors Asher Craig and Kye Dudd to discuss how we can all contribute positively to our environment and was then followed by our very own climate change march around College Green.



In March the four primary schools met for our annual Spelling Bee in the Cresswell Theatre. The year 3 children demonstrated excellent spelling knowledge and were a credit to their schools. Well done to everyone involved. Primary school children also took part in a joint art project and displayed their work in the Cathedral.

As always, music has played an important role in all schools this term and we very much hope that this will continue even though we can't be together to enjoy concerts or ensembles. There were so many planned musical concerts and performances across schools over the coming months including the big trust music concert in the Cathedral. We know that children from all schools within the trust were practising hard and we were very disappointed that we had to postpone the concert but we will rearrange for a later date. Music and the arts will be an important way of getting through the coming months and it will be important to try to connect musically during this time of isolation. We are working on plans to continue musical collaboration in some form during the school closure period and we will be in touch with further details as soon as we can - watch this space!

I know that for those of you with children in Year 6, Year 11 and Year 13, now is a particularly strange time. Where children would normally be gearing up for exams and closure to a phase of learning, it may feel like they are missing out. I do hope that you can help your children to see that, whatever age or stage they are at, their learning will continue. I know that they have all worked incredibly hard to get to this point but this effort is not wasted - they will have laid strong foundations on which they can continue to develop their learning and interests in the years to come. I look forward to celebrating their deserved success when the time is right.

Thank you again for all your support in these challenging circumstances. All of our staff, children and parents will need some time to adjust to the new normal. It will be important to keep a sense of community within and between our schools. Please do get in touch with the schools or central team with any feedback about what has happened so far or ideas for how we can support each other further as we enter such an unusual and unsettling period in education.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Neil Blundell".

Neil Blundell
Executive Principal, Cathedral Schools Trust