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Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to you again with my next update on our response to the spread of Coronavirus. Firstly, you will be aware that guidance on staying at home has changed and is as follows:

- Schools are not directed to close at this point. All decisions remain local decisions.
- Anyone with a new continuous cough or high temperature should stay at home for 14 days, as should all members of that household.
- Everyone should minimise social mixing in the community (being in school is not defined under government guidance as social mixing).
- The government is expected by the end of the week to direct all “at risk” people to stay at home for a period of 12 weeks. At risk people include everyone over 70, pregnant women and anyone with a serious underlying health condition.

Guidance is available here on what the government classes as underlying conditions:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

I would ask you to refer to this guidance in deciding whether your child should attend school. I fully recognise these are difficult decisions and we support you in thinking about what is best for your family.

There is much discussion and debate about the government’s decision to keep schools open. For as long as it remains part of the government’s strategy to keep schools open, I am obliged to attempt to do that each day. The starting point for decision making each day always has to be whether the school has enough staff on site to keep children safe. As more staff are required to stay at home either because they have symptoms, a family member has symptoms or because they are in a vulnerable category, we have fewer staff available. This morning our staff absence has increased significantly and any member of staff who is absent is expected to be for a period of between 14 days and 12 weeks. I support any member of staff who belong to a vulnerable group who chooses to stay at home from today; it is simply wrong, for example, to wait a few days when the risks of social contact for them have been made clear.

I want to be completely open with you about how we will make decisions and possible scenarios over the next few days and weeks.

- Today we will plan for tomorrow and our starting point will be a simple question – do we have enough staff to open and keep our pupils and students safe?
- If we reach the point where we do not have enough staff to keep the whole school open, we will make a decision to see how much of the school we can safely keep open and a partial opening will be confirmed



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- Where we have a partial opening (i.e. open but not for all pupils/students) we will work in priority order, trying to stay open for Years 13 and 11 and we will be confirming each day if this is still sustainable
- We are also very conscious that we want to do everything we can to prevent workers in our health and social care system (e.g. nurses, doctors, paramedics, care workers, midwives, health visitors, social workers, care home workers) having to take time off to look after their own children. Therefore, we are exploring the logistics of offering some form of childcare for the children of those workers in order that we can help the NHS retain as much capacity as possible alongside teaching staff where their school remains open
- We will ensure that online work is available for all pupils/students who are at home
- We will ensure we provide access to meals for pupils/students who are currently registered to receive free school meals in the event that the school is closed or partially closed.

We do not yet have solutions to some of these problems but we will do very soon. We will try really hard to continue to communicate clearly with you and give as much notice of any changes as possible. You should expect changes in how we operate including students not having their usual teachers or being in their usual groups and there will undoubtedly have to be some re-purposing of our schools to help the national effort to slow the spread of this virus.

We have already implemented a number of measures to ensure that staff can focus their energies on those things that will help us keep schools running as normally as possible. This has included cancelling or postponing a number of events between now and Easter, including:

- The Year 8 Progress Evenings planned for Wednesday 25 March and Thursday 2 April
- All domestic trips and visits planned to run before Monday 20 April. A separate letter will go to parents/carers with any additional arrangements for these events
- Routine sporting fixtures. Teams involved in national competitions will continue to compete unless the relevant sporting governing body decides to cancel or postpone the fixture or competition

In addition, we have also cancelled all internal meetings, staff training and professional development events. Please be aware, we are not doing this because of a change in advice or concerns about further spread of the virus, but to allow staff to focus on teaching and supporting our students and to plan on how we respond to a fast moving national picture.

At the moment, and whilst guidance is for schools to remain open, we feel it is in the best interests of Year 11 and Year 13 students to continue to access planned support in the run up to their exams. If it becomes impractical to run these sessions we will contact students and parents/carers as soon as possible.

With regards to school trips abroad you will no doubt be aware, the government is now advising against any international school visits. We are awaiting further information from the government on how long this is for and whether this will be published as official Foreign and Commonwealth Office



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travel guidance. Once we have this information and the implications for claiming back payments for any trips that are cancelled, we will share it with those affected.

I am very grateful for the kindness and support so many parents across the trust have shown us over the last few days. I recognise that as we move into a more difficult situation many parents will agree with our decisions while others may not and that is absolutely fine. Please do not think that our staff are doing anything right now other than trying to do the right thing for our communities, discharging their duties as public servants, at times to their detriment of themselves and their families.

We will do our very best to be open and honest with you. I am conscious of not overwhelming you with communications therefore you will receive just one more update towards the end of the day.

I wish you and your families the very best at this time.

Kind regards

Jonny Uttley  
CEO

Richard Williman  
Headteacher



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