

27th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

COVID-19 – update on school arrangements

I hope very much that you are well and managing in this difficult period. If you are self-isolating and someone is ill, please know that you are in our prayers.

If you are on the frontline, in the NHS, care homes, emergency services, food and distribution, working in a school yourself – **thank you!** You are also very much in our prayers.

We have kept all our schools open for vulnerable children and for the children of key workers and the numbers have stabilized. The children have been great. Keeping physical distance isn't easy, especially for little ones, but they have accepted it and carried on. We are proud of them! Learning has been made available for children at home, sometimes electronically and sometimes through packs, to get us through to Easter.

The reason I am writing now is to explain what will happen over Easter and some changes that we will be making in the following half term, based on what we have learned this past week.

1. Easter Opening Arrangements

Our schools will remain open over the Easter break for the children who absolutely need this provision. Parents/carers have been contacted. If your circumstances have changed and this provision is essential for your child, please contact the Headteacher of your school straight away.

The plan is that children will remain in their own school, with staff that they know. Staff have been brilliant in volunteering. We also have a back-up for our primaries, where there are fewer staff with 7 secondary teachers who have volunteered to help if needed. They will be in the schools week beginning 30th March to get to know the children – mainly Upper Key Stage 2, years 5 and 6.

2. Children at home over Easter

This past week has been emotionally draining for everyone, whether you are a member of school staff on a rota/trying to work remotely whilst looking after your own family; or whether you are a parent having to keep at home children who are used to seeing their friends and the routines of school. That's before we add keeping up with learning. Therefore, to give everyone a break, our schools will not be setting homework for pupils over Easter. The only exception will be some year 11 and 13 students whose grades at GCSE and A-Level will, this year, be based on moderated teacher assessments. If there are key pieces of work to complete, especially coursework, this must be done, to provide the evidence base. Teachers will be contacting students about this individually.

3. Student grades at A level, GCSE and Key Stage 2

I realise that students and their parents are concerned about this. We know that Ofqual, the body that regulates public examinations, and the exam boards themselves, are working

at pace to clarify how this will work. We are expecting an announcement soon about GCSE and A level. As soon as we have that we will write to parents. In the meantime please be reassured that we are ensuring that secondary staff teams can provide the data that will be needed and that it is robust. This is top priority.

4. What will happen after Easter?

We all know that we are in for a long haul, so it is important to pace ourselves. The reality is that schools cannot provide the kind of individual ongoing support for pupils that they would get in school when we are all working remotely. For context, bear in mind that a secondary teacher could be teaching 300 pupils. The systems are not there yet for interactive remote learning; few families have a laptop or tablet for each person; internet speeds at home vary and, in many families, young people are needed to contribute actively at home by looking after siblings, doing household tasks, getting meals ready to help parents who have to work or look after family members who are ill. **We will do everything we can** but after years 13, 11 and 6, we will need to prioritise years 12, 10 and 5 who will take important exams in 2021.

Therefore, I have asked schools to pare the curriculum down to the essentials and go for quality over quantity, backed up by independent learning suggestions and online resources that pupils can follow up themselves at times which fit in with the needs of their families. For our younger children, schools will suggest/recommend learning at home to develop number, reading, social and motor skills, so that parents do not have the additional stress of trying to replicate a classroom at home.

Does that mean my child will be behind when they go into the next year?

Children will not be able to learn as much of the National Curriculum, or their exam specifications, as they would if they were at school. There will be knowledge and skill gaps. We know that, and our schools are planning to make that up when we return. **But also, children can learn other things at home;** practical skills, looking after others, taking responsibility, valuing and appreciating your family. Just because these are not tested, does not mean that they aren't key skills and knowledge for life.

Realistic exams. As a Trust we have fed through to the government the need now to plan for exams in 2021 and adjust expectations. We know this feedback is getting through.

In Summary

Under the circumstances we aren't doing too badly! It is often said that difficult times bring out the best in people, and we are all experiencing that.

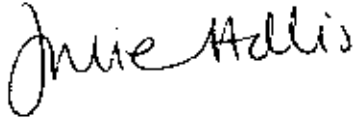
To help our children through this period, we need to work together and be realistic in our expectations – both school staff and parents and support one another. That way, we reduce the general levels of anxiety for children and young people. We are showing, as adults, that this is a difficult time, but these happen in life and we can get through them.

As a Christian trust, we believe that God helps us all along the way, if we let him.

Our chaplain is going to help us with a verse each week for reflection and a short prayer. Can I suggest that you try this on your own or with your family? I think you will find it does make a difference.

With every good wish for all our pupils and their families, their health, wellbeing and development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Hollis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

JULIE HOLLIS
Chief Executive Officer
The Cranmer Education Trust

Chaplain's verse for the week:

Thessalonians 2 (16-18):

"May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word".