

10th November 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Start of Term Update

I hope all our families managed to have some rest and recuperation over half term, and that people are managing to keep well during these difficult times. We know that some families have been badly hit by COVID, and you especially are in our thoughts and prayers.

I'm writing to let you know the additional arrangements and planning we are putting in place as a Trust to ensure that our schools can continue to provide the best opportunities for full and safe contact with young people, so they can learn, progress, and enjoy the companionship of their friends. Even though the rate of infection is rising in our area, it is **far** lower for young people than it is for working-age adults, which shows that school is the safest place, and our intention is to ensure that we keep that provision going.

The challenges are:

1. COVID comes into school from the wider community, and we have to track and trace all the school contacts. This leads to children being sent home to self-isolate, which is upsetting for them, and frustrating for parents.

In this area **we depend entirely on you**. Please **do not** send your child to school if **anyone** in your household has COVID or COVID symptoms. I am sorry I have to repeat this but sadly there have been cases of children whose parents/family members have had a positive test still being sent to school, putting others at risk and causing other children to be sent home. In early years this can mean a bubble of 70 potential contacts. In secondary this could be potentially the whole year bubble who are sent home for 10 school days. The learning loss is immense, not to mention the disruption to other families. If the children are in early years staff must also self-isolate as they cannot maintain the 2m distance from little children.

2. Staffing shortages, which occur when staff are ill, or have to self-isolate, or their childcare provision has had to close, are becoming the biggest challenge for schools. We can't amalgamate classes as this would take children out of their bubbles and mean that they are more likely to become contacts.

Each school has a tipping point depending on its size when there aren't enough staff to run the school safely. We are able to call on some regular supply teachers to cover temporary absences, but you will appreciate that supply has to be managed carefully so we aren't adding to risk levels. Our priority is to reduce the risk of a school being pushed to that tipping point.

Therefore, all 3 schools have shortened lunchtime to reduce the demand on staff for supervision. **Blue Coat's** closing time has been brought forward to 3.05pm to reflect this.

From week beginning 23rd November 2020 instead of a slightly earlier finish each day, **St George's** will be closing to children on Friday at 12.30pm. Key Stage 1 children will eat their lunch before they leave; Key Stage 2 children will be given a grab-bag. The children will not be losing any teaching time, but this arrangement will enable teachers to do essential planning together and mean that they can fully focus on face to face work with children during the rest of the week.

We recognise that this might cause a problem for some families. If you are a critical worker (as defined during lockdown) who works shifts or for whom this would present insuperable difficulties for pick-up (e.g., a care home/hospital/school/supermarkets and food preparation), please discuss this individually with the Headteacher, so that we can plan for care provision in those exceptional cases.

Mayfield is a larger school with more staff, so we are not planning to move to this arrangement as yet. However, if we did suddenly face a high level of staff absence, we would contact parents to introduce the Friday early finish arrangement.

At **Blue Coat**, which is a very big school, we will analyse the impact on the timetable and adjust for the year group/s most affected.

3. If/When it snows heavily

Two of our sites (Blue Coat and St. George's) are difficult to access when there is heavy snow. Basically, the staff who get there first start shovelling and gritting, and normally we put the pupils into the buildings which are most accessible until the site is clear. During COVID we cannot mix the bubbles.

Therefore, if we are experiencing heavy snow, or conditions are making travel to school too difficult, **Blue Coat** will move to working from home for everyone. This will allow the site to be made safe and accessible and allow learning to continue without disruption. Normally we try our best to brave and battle the elements, but it is simply not possible at the moment. We will make the decision early and if we have to close, information will be displayed on the school website and sent via MyEd by 6.45am.

At **St. George's**, the school will open later. Details of times will be sent via text and the school website.

Mayfield has a one-way system and fewer paths to dig out, so is unlikely to be affected – but please do watch out for texts/updates via the school website, just in case.

Other Matters

- Blue Coat Admissions Policy consultation for 2022 entry and beyond, will commence in the middle of November and will run for 6 weeks.
- All our schools are preparing for Advent and Christmas – the light coming into our darkness. They will contact you individually (but I hope we will have photographs that we can all share).
- Our new free school's website was launched on 6th November. Welcome to The Brian Clarke Church of England Academy (www.brian-clarke.org). Do have a look and see where all this has come from. And most important, the opportunities our new school will offer to young people, and the choice it will provide for parents.

Thank you for all your support. It is much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



JULIE HOLLIS
Chief Executive Officer
The Cranmer Education Trust