



13 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to update you on the on the current situation regarding the Coronavirus as it applies to Durham Johnston Comprehensive School. We have followed the advice from Public Health England and have received regular, daily updates from the Department of Education about education settings and travel abroad. It is clear that, after yesterday's government briefing, there has now been a change of emphasis regarding national advice. Schools have been advised to cancel all foreign trips and advice regarding self-isolation has also been modified. Whilst we have been made aware of these developments, it is fair to note that there is still a significant lack of clarity for schools that might aid our contingency planning. Whilst this is understandable based upon the unprecedented nature of the situation, it makes it very difficult to offer parents detailed advice regarding individual queries whilst putting plans in place for all of our students. On that basis, I would ask parents not to call with individual questions as that will take key staff away from key priorities when we are using our available time to support students within school and preparing a potential situation in which the school might be closed.

As you are aware, there has been significant public debate about whether or not there should be widespread school closures in the United Kingdom. It would be unwise if Durham Johnston were not to prepare for that possible eventuality and to also fully risk assess any plans that we put into place. As you will appreciate, this requires a significant amount of additional work for school staff beyond their daily administrative, teaching, assessment and planning commitments and is not something that can be done quickly or easily. Therefore, our risk assessment addresses each of the following areas.

Contingency Planning

If the school closes we will use the school website and email to provide work and learning opportunities for students. Resources will be checked regularly and updated for as long as potential closure lasts. We are currently working to bring these resources together and want to reassure parents and carers that we will produce the most appropriate resources possible based upon circumstance.

Prioritising work for Year 11 and Year 13 students

Subject Leaders and classroom teachers have been identifying revision materials, online resources and exam papers that will help our students with external examinations to revise at home if necessary. It would be sensible to make sure that your child has access to school email and somewhere to work independently at home. There is a possibility that we might very limited notice of closure, so we have already started to provide materials for key classes. Ofqual, the government agency responsible for examinations, are currently reviewing their arrangements for the summer exam season and we will update students via the school website and parent app if they offer any new information.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/updated-statement-on-coronavirus>

Work for years 7, 8, 9, 10 and 12

We are also identifying work and resources that younger students can access and use to and will use exactly the same approach as referenced above. It would be sensible to make sure that your child has access to school email and somewhere to work independently at home.

School Trips

The government has advised schools to cancel all overseas school trips and visits. They have advised, *'Against all overseas education trips for children under 18. This is because trip leaders would face significant challenges in making arrangements to ensure children's welfare, should adult supervisors or children be required to self-isolate.'* In addition to this very clear advice, we have some significant concerns about being able to access the necessary insurance, the possible risk of being quarantined whilst abroad and whether or not travel companies and hotels will be able to honour current bookings. This leaves the school with no choice but to cancel the German study visit to Austria, the Battlefields study visit to Belgium & France and the two Malaga visits scheduled for June and July 2020. We have followed Foreign Office advice very closely and will now work diligently to ensure that insurance providers are contacted, that we assess costs and provide refunds. We will do all that we can to achieve maximum refunds for parents and carers. Please do not contact staff members with individual queries regarding school trips as they will not be able to give any immediate answers, as we will contact all parents and carers via the school website when we have more information.

Parents Evenings, Concerts and Scheduled Meetings

We have reviewed meetings and performances that are scheduled for the remainder of this half term and the Year 8 parents' evening planned for Monday 23rd March 2020 will no longer be going ahead. It is very important that parents and carers have the opportunity to meet with parents and we will reschedule the meeting for later in the summer term. Similarly, the school's spring concert has been cancelled and will not take place on Thursday 26th March. The school will continue to monitor governmental advice and will assess other meetings as appropriate.

Personal Wellbeing

There are a small number of students, staff and other members of the wider school community with suppressed immune systems. The school cannot offer medical advice regarding those conditions and would advise that if you have any concerns, to contact your GP, 111 or to take advice from Public Health England. We are aware that many parents and carers are very anxious and it is important that we work together and support each other. In simple terms, there are many questions that we cannot currently answer and I would ask for your good sense and patience. Schools have faced a number of years of austerity and reduced budgets and our resources will be stretched further by current circumstances. We will continue to provide a high level of support for all members of the school community and will plan as carefully as possible for the weeks ahead, but all decisions will be based upon the level of resource that we have available. We will continue to provide regular updates and thank you for your support.

Yours faithfully,

A J O'Sullivan
Headteacher