



19 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

You will all be aware that the decision was made yesterday to close all schools as of Friday 20th March. Whilst this represents decisive action, the government are still trying to plan for the impact that this will have. This is understandable, as schools play a pivotal role in our communities and there are a significant number of issues to address and questions to answer based upon the Government's action.

The government also announced that GCSE and A Level examinations are to be cancelled for May and June 2020 and explained that schools would stay open for the children of key workers. These are actions that they feel to be necessary based upon the current national emergency. John Dunford, Headteacher at Durham Johnston between 1982 and 1998, often said that leadership was 10% doing things and 90% explaining why you had done them. Nationally, we are in the 10% part of that equation and are desperately waiting for the 90% to be shared. There is no criticism intended in that comment; the government faces a terrible crisis and they are reacting to changing circumstances and trying their best.

As we prepare to close at 2.45 p.m. on Friday I would like to explain some actions that we have taken regarding the three key points made by the government yesterday:

- **School Closure and communication** – We will close at 2.45 p.m. on Friday 20th March for our remaining year 7, 8 and 11 students. Students will be asked to take books, resources and all personal items home with them. If anything is left behind we will do our best to make sure that personal items are secured. However, it is worth noting that the Emergency Bill due to pass through Parliament this week might lead to the school being used by the Local Authority in the coming weeks. During the national closure we will update resources regularly and I will continue to communicate with all parents and carers via the website on a weekly basis. If any decisions are made by the Department for Education during this period we will update the school website immediately. It will be very difficult for school staff to communicate and respond to individual queries during this period and your support with this has been greatly appreciated. The relevant sections of the website to check regularly are the **News** and **Home Learning Resources** pages. We will also issue alerts via our school App and Twitter.
- **Key Workers** – As noted above, the government has announced that all schools will close on Friday 20th March for an indefinite period, but that they will be open for the children of key workers as of Monday 23rd March. At the time of writing, key workers included those working in the NHS, police, delivery drivers and teachers. Like all schools, we are waiting for further advice and instruction about how this will be managed and are aware that many parents have already made independent arrangements, or have one parent working from home already. At present we have been informed that care will be provided if **both** parents are key workers.

continued overleaf



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Could I ask you to complete the attached form and return it to the following email address keyworkers@durhamjohnston.org.uk or hand it in at school reception tomorrow in order to support our initial planning. The email address will be active from this evening. We will share more information about our plans as soon as we have greater clarity from the Department for Education and when we have undertaken the appropriate risk assessment.

- **Year 12 and 13 A Level Exams** – The mood in school today has been understandably melancholy as our Year 13 students have grasped that their time at school is coming to an end. They have also been anxious about the cancellation of exams and the lack of any clear sense of what their next steps might be. As a school, we are in exactly the same position and cannot provide answers to any of those questions. Therefore, we have focused solely on supporting our students, avoiding speculation and helping them to plan for the coming weeks. We have held assemblies for Years 12 and 13 today and have ensured that they have all of the resources that they need. **Their time with us finished at 2.45 p.m. today.** We will update the school website as soon as information becomes available from Ofqual, individual exam boards or the Department for Education and we have encouraged students to maintain good study habits. It is sensible to continue with preparation and revision until a national plan for exams is shared.
- **Year 11 GCSE Exams** – Our Year 11 students will continue with their mock exams, as it has provided them with structure in a very difficult week. They have been excellent this week and are also coming to terms with the reality of their time at school ending. There are usually rituals associated with leaving, but, unfortunately, that will not be possible this year. Year 11 will continue with exams tomorrow and Mr Simpson will say goodbye briefly at 2.15 p.m. **A number of Year 11 students have been absent through illness this week, or are self-isolating. It is important that they stay at home tomorrow, as that will protect both them individually and the wider school community.** As with Year 13, we will update the school website as soon as information becomes available from Ofqual, individual exam boards or the Department for Education and have encouraged students to maintain good study habits. It is sensible to continue with preparation and revision until a national plan for exams is shared.

I have thanked parents and carers for their support already this week and would like to do so again. I feel very privileged to serve Durham Johnston's school community and staff, parents and students have demonstrated a sense of collective endeavour in the last two weeks that has made a difficult time for the school manageable.

I wish you and your loved ones good health in the weeks ahead and want to assure you that we will continue to stay in touch.

Yours faithfully,

A J. O'Sullivan

**A O'Sullivan
Headteacher**