



20 March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I wrote to you yesterday to provide an update regarding the three key decisions made by the Government on Wednesday. Their guidance on school closures was decisive and easily understood and, whilst all parents and carers are aware that GCSE and A Level exams were to be cancelled, the detail of how grades will be awarded is still being discussed by Ofqual and the Department for Education. It is a very difficult time to be a student in Year 11 or 13 and, as parents, you will be rightly anxious too. Like teachers, parents are used to having the answer or being able to find a solution that helps. That isn't possible at present. As soon as we have more information we will share it with you via the school website and we will continue to prioritise our students that were preparing for exams.

The Children of Key Workers

The other decision made the Government related to the need for schools to stay open for the children of key workers. At that point, the Cabinet Office had not provided a list of key workers and that information only became available late on Thursday 19th March. The Government also offered contradictory advice regarding the eligibility criteria for key workers. We have waited before sharing our approach with parents and carers because many schools made decisions yesterday that are no longer coherent based upon the Government's changing position. Therefore, we would like to offer the following information for parents and carers regarding school provision for the children of key workers:

1. The government have provided a list of key workers and advice for those parents and carers. That advice can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

2. There is also more general advice for parents and carers about school closures:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

3. We asked the parents of key workers to write to us yesterday outlining their plans. If you are an eligible key worker could you please contact the school using the following email address:

keyworkers@durhamjohnston.org.uk If possible, could you please let us know what your plans are?

4. A number of parents have already contacted the school to let us know that they have already made plans for their child. This is in line with the advice from the Government. As part of their guidance they have explained that, "The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of Covid-19 is clear. **If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit, the chance of the virus spreading. This is why the government has asked parents to keep their children at home wherever possible** ad asked schools to only remain open for those children **who absolutely need to attend**. It is important to underline that schools remain safe places for children. **But the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.**"

continued overleaf



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5. It is important that parents and carers follow the advice outlined above and I would like to thank all those who have shared their alternative plans with us. Therefore, we will have a skeleton staff in place next week to support the small number of younger students that might need to access childcare. It is important to be aware that it will not be a normal school day and that our main priority will be to safeguard and care for children. We will not have the facility to offer normal lessons or subject teaching. We will take very clear precautions regarding hygiene and safety for students and staff and will only be using a small section of our school site. As a Local Authority school we will open between 8.00 a.m. and 4.00 p.m. so as to be able to access safeguarding and child protection support from county support teams. We will restrict access to the site between 8.30 a.m. and 3.00 p.m. and will assess risk on a daily basis, prioritising the health and safety of students and staff at all times. We will share more information directly with parents who intend to access childcare and will provide updates via the school website.
6. We will write individual letters to those key workers who need to access childcare providing more details about our initial plans.

Support for Vulnerable Students

The Government also highlighted the need for schools to support vulnerable students. We have been working closely with parents, carers and external agencies for two weeks now to ensure that we have detailed support in place. We will provide consistent and regular support for those students and will be flexible in our provision. It is worth noting that a large number of students have the potential to become 'vulnerable' in the coming weeks and we will work with the Local Authority and other schools to provide more of a collective response in the weeks ahead. In accordance with Government advice, the majority of those children will be staying safely at home.

Free School Meals Entitlement

We have written to the parents and carers of all those entitled to free school meals today outlining how we will support and provide for families in the coming weeks. Please look out for updates on the website and contact the school if you need additional support. We will work closely with the Local Authority to help any of the families in our community that are struggling.

There is a strong possibility that some of this information will change quickly as we react to new information or changes in Government policy. We will continue to share new information with you via our website and via the school App and will try our hardest to help all members of the school community. Thank you again for your support and understanding during this challenging period.

Yours faithfully,

A J. O'Sullivan

A J O'Sullivan
Headteacher