



13th March 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers,

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

I am writing to inform you of steps we are taking as a Trust regarding the COVID-19 epidemic.

Potential school closures

As I am sure you are aware, the UK Government announced yesterday that it is moving to the next, 'delay' stage of its COVID-19 strategy. At this time, this does **not** include school closure and all schools in our Trust will remain open. It is possible that as the epidemic develops this position may change and we will wait for advice and act accordingly.

There is the possibility, however, that our schools may have to consider closure should staffing levels drop below the point where Headteachers can guarantee adequate supervision and where there is a risk to health and safety. This will be an individual school decision, in consultation with the Trust. In this event, all our schools will make every effort to communicate closure in good time, using their normal systems. Please ensure that you check these regularly. If your contact details have changed, please inform the school as soon as possible.

If closures occur, our schools will make every effort to provide distance learning materials for children where they are able.

Visits, school trips and gatherings

For the well-being and protection of children, staff and parents/carers, the decision has been taken to postpone all scheduled visits, trips and gatherings. This will begin from Monday 16th March for the remainder of this term and will be reviewed prior to the start of the summer term on Monday 20th April. This includes all parent consultation evenings, performances, sporting fixtures and other school based events.

The government has also advised that visits abroad should temporarily cease and schools will be liaising with families who are affected regarding next steps.

Public examinations

We are very much aware that pupils and students taking public examinations this year will be anxious about the implications of the epidemic.

The examinations regulator Ofqual have provided the following advice for schools this week:

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'We recognise that students, parents, schools and colleges will be concerned about the possible impact of coronavirus on the 2020 summer exam series. Our advice at this time is to continue to prepare for exams and other assessments as normal.

We continue to work closely with exam boards, other regulators and the Department for Education and we have met to plan for a range of scenarios, as the public would expect. Our overriding priorities are fairness to students this summer and keeping disruption to a minimum. It is still many weeks until exams start and we will issue updated advice if necessary, giving schools and colleges as much notice as possible.'

Hygiene and cleaning

(i) Hand sanitisers/ hand washing

The Department of Health and Social Care has launched a public information campaign that focuses on the importance of handwashing. Washing hands for 20 seconds is central to prevent and slow the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/public-information-campaign-focuses-on-handwashing>

Hand sanitiser dispensers are being installed in all of our schools this week. The hand sanitiser is called Zoono GermFree 24. This product is non alcohol based (following NYCC health and safety advice), bonds to the skin and protects the hands for a full 24 hours with one application. GermFree24 has been tested for dermatological efficacy. <https://zoonousa.com/hand-sanitizer/>

(ii) Tissues

Tissues have been delivered to every school and will be available in all classrooms in the Trust for the use of staff, pupils and students.

(iii) Cleaning

Most of our schools are cleaned using a system called Tersano(<https://www.tersano.com/#products>).

We are prioritising certain areas of the schools for more regular cleaning and we intend to pay additional attention to all contact surfaces. The cleaning teams are prepared to undertake whole school deep cleans when or if the need arises.

We will ensure that soap dispensers remain topped up and that toilets are cleaned regularly. We will continue to meet the needs of those students with medical conditions who need to use the toilets more frequently.

Further Information and guidance

All our schools follow Department of Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE) advice.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

Every school in the UK now receives daily updates from the DfE and we also have a direct advice line should we wish to ask questions, for example, with regard to families returning from affected regions.

Parents, carers and young people can also contact the government helpline as follows:

Phone: 0800 046 8687

Email: DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk

Opening hours: 8am to 6pm (Monday to Friday)

The following links may also be helpful:

Up to date Government advice on Coronavirus

<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

The Government's Coronavirus Action Plan; a guide to what you can expect across the UK

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-action-plan>

Mental health & wellbeing

The risk to children not suffering with underlying health conditions is very low. Otherwise healthy young people have a part to play in delaying the spread of the disease, but it is important not to overplay the risks to their own health or others in their family.

We are concerned, however, about the mental health and well-being of our young people. For some pupils/students, concerns about Coronavirus are exacerbating anxieties and schools and parents have a role to play here. You know your own child best, but together we should:

- Do our best to not sensationalise or over dramatise this issue
- Not hide information from children but stick to known facts
- Not pass our own concerns or stresses onto our children

Thank-you for your support in helping us to do our very best to protect you and your children.

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact your child's school directly.

Yours faithfully,

Martyn Sibley
Chief Education Officer