

8 January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

I am writing to you following the initial three days of lockdown to provide a brief update. Firstly, I would like to thank you on behalf of the headteachers and staff across our eight schools. We have received kind messages of support this week via email and telephone, and it is very much appreciated.

Remote Learning

Our remote learning offer has been up and running this week in primary and secondary schools. I am delighted that our offer in all of our schools exceeds the guidance from the Government. In our secondary schools, pupils are accessing their regular timetables with their usual teachers remotely. Where this is not possible, for example, Key Stage 3 Physical Education, the schools are exploring alternative activities for pupils. In our primary schools, the remote offer currently exceeds guidance. Nationally, this is a more significant challenge for primaries because of the greater demand for school places in primary schools and less capacity than secondary schools.

Pupils are well-practised in accessing our remote learning offer on Google Classroom in the secondary schools and Microsoft Teams in the primary schools. However, should parents or pupils remain unsure full details are available on school websites. Please contact the individual school if you have any problems accessing remote learning. It is crucial that your child continues to engage in their education to continue to make progress during this period. Despite our collective efforts, we all know that there is no substitute for being in a classroom, however, the expectations remain high in terms of participation and engagement in this period of no face-to-face teaching.

Laptops and Devices

As part of our business continuity plans for all our schools, the Trust made remote learning contingencies back in September of last year. We anticipated that some pupils would be unable to access remote learning either through no access to a device or the internet, or there not being enough devices in a household for everyone.

Our financial investment in remote learning was made by purchasing new devices and re-conditioning existing devices. The Government has also contributed 300 devices to the Trust.

To date, all pupils identified as not having access to a device have been provided with access to one. Staff ensure that all pupils at home are engaging with remote learning and attendance remains strong across the Trust. Should families wish to discuss any further support regarding devices, please contact the school their child attends directly.

Year 11 Pupils and GCSE Examinations

As you will be aware, the Secretary of State confirmed that no examinations would take place in the summer of 2021. The Department for Education is yet to provide schools with any further information about the cancellation of GCSE examinations in the summer. To date, only a brief statement about how grades will be awarded has been communicated. These will be teacher assessed with support given to ensure that grades are fair and consistent. In the coming weeks, we will find out more, and both secondary schools will share information as a matter of urgency. Pupils will need to carry on working with the determination they currently have.

Free School Meals

The Trust is working alongside Chartwells, our catering contractor, to provide food hampers for all eligible children (those accessing benefit related free school meals). The Trust is currently investigating a different approach to avoid the requirement for parents/carers to collect hampers from the schools.

Vulnerable children and children of critical workers

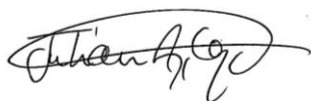
For clarity, vulnerable pupils, regardless of their year group, are expected to attend school as usual during the lockdown. In addition, children of critical workers are eligible to attend. Please contact the school directly should you need to discuss a school place. Please note that current Government guidance is that parents and carers who are critical workers, should keep their children at home if they can.

Coronavirus testing on-site (secondary schools only)

You will be aware of the Covid-19 testing arrangements in secondary schools. During the lockdown, pupils attending the school (vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers) can be tested if parental consent is received. Secondary schools will issue a separate letter next week.

Thank you once again for your support during these challenging times.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julian Appleyard', written in a cursive style.

Julian Appleyard OBE
Chief Executive Officer