



19th March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

Update following message from Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education

I am sure many of you listened to the message from Gavin Williamson last night and like us are wondering what was said actually means for Alderman Knight and other special schools across the country in terms of closure.

Within the message he stated that

‘To provide parents, students and staff with the certainty they need we are announcing that schools, colleges and early years settings will be closed to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday, as part of the country’s on-going response to coronavirus.

Examples of these workers include NHS staff, police and delivery drivers who need to be able to go to work. Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans. ‘

Obviously all of our pupils have EHCPs. However it is currently unclear if this message was actually referring to special schools.

Clearly we will work hard to support our school community and the wider community through this difficult time. However we do not believe it is reasonable or practical for us to try and stay open ‘as normal’. Yesterday we had 20 staff absent (15 self-isolating). We also have a number of other staff in the high risk category and of course many of our staff have children that are not going to school from Monday. So as you can imagine trying to decide the best way forward isn’t easy and will take time.

We know that this morning there is due to be another announcement before 9.30am and I have already been in touch with the Local Authority who are meeting this morning to discuss possible approaches to providing support required for key workers and vulnerable children.

There is also an emergency meeting of the Gloucestershire Special School Head teachers tomorrow at 10am as we feel it is vitally important that we work together to determine what provision, as special schools, we can put in place to support those children and families who need it most and also allow front line workers to do their jobs as well for the good of all of us.

Therefore, please understand that at this moment in time I really cannot give you any more information about what is going to happen next week or in coming months. We are aiming to have a plan that we can share with you by tomorrow afternoon.

In the meantime I would be really grateful if you could let us have some further information to support our planning. Please send responses via SeeSaw, Dojo, email or ring the office

1. Does your job make you a 'key worker'? The examples given so far include NHS staff, police and delivery drivers. If so please can you tell us what your line of work is?
2. Do you propose to either continue to self-isolate or start self-isolating?

Finally just to say I am sorry I haven't got all the answers – none of us have! We heard the news at the same time as everyone else.

However please rest assured we are all working as hard as we can to try and work out a way forward while trying to maintain a calm, positive, relaxed atmosphere in school for your children.

Best wishes



Clare Steel

Head teacher

Message from Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education, 18th March 2020 for all working in the education sector

The government recognises the huge importance of the role you have played in maintaining the education, training and social care of our children and young people during this challenging time. I recognise that you will have the same anxieties as the rest of the country about your health and that of your families. On behalf of the Prime Minister and the entire government, I thank you all for all of your work so far, and your continued support. I am deeply grateful for the civic spirit and dedication of everyone working in education, and I will continue to provide my full support throughout this crisis.

Next steps

It is clear that education and children's social care settings are increasingly finding it difficult to continue as normal, as illness and self-isolation impacts on staffing levels and pupil attendance. To provide parents, student and staff with the certainty they need we are announcing that schools, colleges and early years settings will be closed to everyone except children of key workers and vulnerable children from Monday, as part of the country's ongoing response to coronavirus.

Examples of these workers include NHS staff, police and delivery drivers who need to be able to go to work. Vulnerable children include those who have a social worker and those with Education, Health and Care Plans.

A full list of key worker categories will be published by the Cabinet Office tomorrow.

Children who do not fall into these groups should remain at home with appropriate care.

Where schools are unable to provide this reduced provision, local authorities will work with the Department for Education's regional teams to ensure an alternative option is available.

We are expecting early years providers and sixth form and further education colleges to do the same. We are working with Her Majesty's Treasury on the financial support required. We are also asking that independent schools and boarding schools follow the same approach.

Where possible, we would encourage settings to stay open for this purpose throughout the Easter holidays.

Many universities and other higher education institutions are already taking necessary steps to keep their staff and students safe and where possible keep providing education. We are confident vice-chancellors are making the right decisions and the Department for Education continues to support them in doing so.

Temporary suspension of Ofsted inspections

Ofsted is to temporarily suspend routine inspections of schools, colleges, early years settings, children's social care providers and local authorities to reduce the burden on staff who are providing vital services to the nation in response to coronavirus.

Update on assessments and examinations

We can confirm that we will not go ahead with assessments or exams, and that we will not be publishing performance tables for this academic year.

We will work with the sector and Ofqual to ensure children get the qualifications they need.

Specialist School in

Communication & Interaction



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My Department is working closely with local authorities, representatives of early years, schools and head teachers, regional school commissioners and bodies such as Ofsted and Ofqual about how to deliver this change as effectively as possible.

And we will do whatever is necessary to support local authorities, settings, schools and teachers through the weeks and months ahead.

Free school meal provision

We will give schools the flexibility to provide meals or vouchers to children eligible for free school meals. Some schools are already doing this, and we will reimburse the costs. As soon as possible, we will put in place a national voucher system.

Thank you once again for everything you are doing at this difficult time.

The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP

Secretary of State for Education