

Messages from the School

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Coronavirus (COVID19) - 20 March

Sent: Friday 20 March 2020

From: networkmail@strs.org.uk

Dear Parents

It is clear that we all need to do what we can to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the School will continue to follow the Government's advice on [self-isolation](#), [household isolation](#), [social distancing](#) and handwashing. The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 indicates that if children can stay safely at home, they should do so.

Consequently, the Government has asked schools to remain open only for those children who absolutely need to attend. 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.

'Key Worker' update

In my email to parents yesterday, I suggested that the list of 'Key Worker' occupations was likely to include NHS staff; Care home staff; all emergency services; workers supporting the production of ventilation equipment and medical supplies; retail delivery workers and other key public sector employees. The list has now been finalised by the Cabinet Office:

Health and social care

This includes doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, social workers, care workers, and other frontline health and social care staff including volunteers; the support and specialist staff required to maintain the UK's health and social care sector; those working as part of the health and social care supply chain, including producers and distributors of medicines and medical and personal protective equipment.

Education and childcare

This includes nursery and teaching staff, social workers and those specialist education professionals.

Key public services

This includes those essential to the running of the justice system, religious staff, charities and workers delivering key frontline services, those responsible for the management of the deceased, and journalists and broadcasters who are providing public service broadcasting.

Local and national government

This only includes those administrative occupations essential to the effective delivery of the COVID-19 response or delivering essential public services such as the payment of benefits.

Food and other necessary goods

This includes those involved in food production, processing, distribution, sale and delivery as well as those essential to the provision of other key goods (for example hygienic and veterinary medicines).

Public safety and national security

This includes police and support staff, Ministry of Defence civilians, contractor and armed forces personnel (those critical to the delivery of key defence and national security outputs and essential to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic), fire and rescue service employees (including support staff), National Crime Agency staff, those maintaining border security, prison and probation staff and other national security roles, including those overseas.

Transport

This includes those who will keep the air, water, road and rail passenger and freight transport modes operating during the COVID-19 response, including those working on transport systems through which supply chains pass.

Utilities, communication and financial services

This includes staff needed for essential financial services provision (including but not limited to workers in banks, building societies and financial market infrastructure), the oil, gas, electricity and water sectors (including sewerage), information technology and data infrastructure sector and primary industry supplies to continue during the COVID-19 response, as well as key staff working in the civil nuclear, chemicals, telecommunications (including but not limited to network operations, field engineering, call centre staff, IT and data infrastructure, 999 and 111 critical services), postal services and delivery, payments providers and waste disposal sectors.

If parents think they fall within the critical categories above, they should confirm with their employer that, based on their business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this essential public service. We have asked those parents who then believe that they are a 'Key worker' and need us to look after their son to complete the online form issued yesterday. The deadline for this is today by 7pm.

<https://forms.gle/yuigRuxEvBPavCni7>

Extra-curricular activities and use of the School site

If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be. Therefore, regrettably the School will not be open to pupils to use the weights' room, the Learning Resources Centre nor for rehearsals and other group activities.

Arrangements for pupils coming in to school (children of Key Workers and vulnerable children only)

Children of Key Workers and vulnerable children will be accommodated in classrooms and in the Learning Resources Centre. The usual times of the school day will apply meaning that each morning, registration will take place at 8.40am in the school Reception area. Pupils will then be directed to a classroom and will complete the work set for each lesson as directed on ShowMyHomework. (SMHW). At break and at lunchtime, pupils are welcome to purchase food from the school canteen following the usual arrangements or they can bring food from home. The school day will end as normal at 3.30 p.m. Senior staff will be on the premises until 5 p.m. Pupils coming in to school may wear casual clothes or school uniform.

Arrangements for pupils not coming in to school

Work will be set for pupils in all years via ShowMyHomework (SMHW). We will review our approach to setting work for Year 11 and Year 13 as further government advice becomes available. Initially, our thoughts are that staff will continue to set work for Year 11 and Year 13 until they were due to go on study leave.

Whilst this arrangement will be co-ordinated by Heads of Department, each subject teacher will set work for all their classes, lesson by lesson, and pupils will be advised to follow their usual school timetable each day at home.

We ask parents to support their child to learn effectively by identifying a space for them to work at home and by helping them to explore concepts independently online or by using other resources such as the textbook or specific websites that they are directed to by their teachers.

Pupils may ask questions and communicate with their teachers about their work using SMHW. However, it is important to emphasise that pupils may not receive an instant response as some teachers will be required to be in school and some may not be well enough to reply. In this instance, pupils should not worry and instead contact a friend or a classmate or move on to another task or another subject.

We will review our approach to setting of work for students not attending school as further government guidance becomes available.

Families who may be struggling financially

As I am sure you are aware from the Government announcements yesterday, a voucher scheme will be implemented to replace the current Free School Meals offer. At present, we do not know what the system will look like, nor how it will operate. In the interim, the school canteen will remain open throughout the week for pupils to access Free School Meals. Mr Davies is communicating directly with the parents of these pupils. If you have any other queries about financial matters Nicky Binning, the School's Finance Director may be able to help: neb@strs.org.uk

External examinations

Despite the Department for Education's announcement this afternoon, information on how GCSE and A Level grades will be calculated is still very limited. Ofqual has said that they will develop and set out a process that will provide a calculated grade to each student which reflects their performance as fairly as possible, and will work with the exam boards to ensure this is consistently applied for all students. In the meantime, please be assured that we will act in our students' very best interests in all cases. Mr Lynch (Head of Sixth Form) and Mr Daniell (Head of Upper School) will write to Year 13 and Year 11 students' parents respectively once we have been given a clear directive from the Government on how the awarding of grades will work in practice. At the moment, we cannot provide any more details nor would be appropriate to respond to individual queries or requests for information.

Celebrating the end of the School Year for Year 11 and Year 13

With the news of sudden school closures, we are also well aware that Year 11 and 13 have been particularly affected. Whilst we don't know how long schools will remain closed, we are intending to make arrangements to celebrate Year 11's and Year 13's time in School when we are permitted to do so.

School re-opening

I know many parents are concerned that the media are reporting schools are unlikely to open again until September. The implications of potentially six months off school are significant, obviously for the education of children and for their mental well-being. I want to reassure parents that the School will re-open as soon as the Government allows us to do so, regardless of the stage of the academic year.

Mental Health and well-being

Whilst the Mental Health Support Team are not currently able to offer their service due to the redeployment of NHS staff to frontline duties, there is a CAMHS helpline available for children, young people and families who may require support and advice from the NHS: Telephone 01452 894300 (9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Friday). The following websites may also be of use:

Winston's Wish <https://www.winstonswish.org/>

Young Minds <https://youngminds.org.uk/>

Tic + <https://ticplus.org.uk/>

Rethink self-harm <https://www.rethink.org/help-in-your-area/services/advice-and-helplines/gloucestershire-self-harm-telephone-support/>

Family lives <https://www.familylives.org.uk/>

Mood juice <https://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/>

Communicating with parents

I am pleased to hear that parents have found the updates regarding our response to this crisis useful. However, in order to help ease the burden on staff, we may not be able to respond to individual queries and concerns directly from now on. Whilst I will endeavour to update parents regularly, particularly when we have new information from the Government, I shall not be sending emails on a daily basis.

Finally, thank you so much to all that have offered their support and gratitude for that which we are doing. I would also like to thank all the staff for their hard work and constant support of our pupils. Seeing one or two members of Year 13 upset this afternoon has brought into focus the strength our school community. It is our values, our ethos, the way we do things that underpin the education that pupils receive here. Such moments cannot be planned or created. They evolve. The character of our School is shaped by the time we have together. Even though we may not be meeting regularly, the School's collective work is continued through our pupils' attitudes and conduct elsewhere. We are not educated to become bystanders but to make things happen and we expect our students as they mature to shoulder that responsibility. Responsibility is a burden to be carried, but it is also the greatest privilege to have the skills to shape events in your own life and the lives of others around you.

We have worked hard over the last year to develop our students' love of literature through introducing dedicated reading in tutor time. Indeed, I believe that poetry can be a big stress reliever. I cannot help but think of the ending of Tennyson's Ulysses where Ulysses speaks to sailors that have been working and travelling with him. He maintains that he, and they, still have the capacity to do something honourable and noble despite their weary state:

We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Garde Ta Foy

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Matthew Morgan,
Headmaster