



www.advantageschools.co.uk

19th March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

Re: COVID-19 – arrangements for school closure.

Please read this letter carefully. It requires some action.

Following on from my last update, I'm now writing to confirm that the school will close to almost all children after this Friday 20/03/2020 until further notice.

As advised by the government, we will do all we can to stay open for the children of key workers and children with certain needs.

We also intend to try to provide meals/meal vouchers to pupils who are entitled to free school meals but are not allowed to come to school.

As part of our planning and preparations, to include how that affects our pupils, we are asking for your support in ensuring we have the correct information as follows:

If you are currently in the process of applying for free school meals **or** if you currently qualify for free school meals but haven't advised us, please advise us on meals@advantageschools.co.uk or telephone your child's school.

If your child has an EHCP **and** you are intending for your child to continue attending school, please email keyworker@advantageschools.co.uk or telephone your child's school.

Please note, **we do NOT know the definition of key workers currently**. We will update this as soon as we know. However, we are confident it will include at least, workers in the NHS, emergency services, social care, school staff and food distribution. **If this includes others we will update you as soon as we know. If your occupation is not on this list, please assume that your child will need to stay at home.**

If you, or any other adult in the house, are key workers – this includes workers in the NHS, emergency services, social care, school staff or food distribution **and** you require for your child to continue attending school in order to support you in your role please email keyworker@advantageschools.co.uk or telephone your child's school. Please include your child's name, their school, their class or form class, your name, your occupation and the address of your workplace.

If you are able to confirm that you require your child to attend school, we expect them to do so every day during normal school hours. If you require extended hours (from 7.30am, or until 6pm) please let us know on keyworker@advantageschools.co.uk and we will try hard to facilitate.

We require a response by midday on Friday 20th March 2020 if at all possible, please.

T: 01234 332277 E: info@advantageschools.co.uk Advantage Schools, 12-16 Cauldwell Street, Bedford, MK42 9AD

ASPIRATION • RESPECT • HONESTY

We hope to keep both of our schools open over the Easter period. Should you be a keyworker or a child with an EHCP and you require your child to attend school during the Easter period, we will write to you to confirm arrangements forthwith.

All other children will need to stay at home, so we ask that you do not send your child into school from Monday onwards.

Please note that this is a national closure so while it is a challenging situation, we are not alone. We will re-open fully as soon as we can and will let you know when this is by letters emailed out to parents as well as updates on our Facebook pages and, where possible, our websites.

During this period of disruption, we recognise that communication will be very important. It is also the case that information and advice may change quite regularly. The potential for confusion and mixed messages will be high. We ask for your patience and understanding during this extraordinary period and I will continue to update you as often as possible.

While the school is closed, we encourage you to keep monitoring the government's advice – the information can be found on the websites listed below:

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

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>

We are committed to working together to maintain as much continuity of education as is possible. Things will, however, be different. We will communicate regarding education or work via ShowMyHomework (BFS) or Class Dojo (Elstow) but communication with parents will be via usual methods. Colleagues may attempt to do other things, but will communicate their attempts here. Most of our pupils, particularly those who are older, have access to hard copies of materials already, which we have distributed – or we will endeavour to get them to you, if your child has been self-isolating this week.

How will we keep in touch with you?

Queries over email to teaching staff will be answered, but we cannot guarantee that responses will be as timely as we would usually be able to manage. The email addresses of staff are first initial followed by surname @ school name .co.uk For example Chris Smith at Bedford Free School would be csmith@bedfordfreeschool.co.uk and Denise John at Elstow School would be djohn@elstowschool.co.uk.

My child has to stay at home. Will I need to register my child with you each day?

No. If the school is closed, you will be responsible for the care of your child during the day. We will not be monitoring their movements, nor can we be responsible for the extent to which your child engages with the work that is set.

Will the school provide work for my child to be doing while the school is closed?

Yes. Teachers will set work for students to complete and will be in contact throughout. However, we are unlikely to run lessons remotely. Pupils and parents should not expect teachers to deliver content over Skype, YouTube, Social Media or through remote 'chat' facilities.

At BFS, teachers may email pupils, but will only use school email addresses. At Elstow School, teachers will contact pupils through Purple Mash. Parents will be contacted through email, Facebook and Class Dojo. Parents can contact their child's class teacher through Class Dojo or by email.

How much work should my child be completing during this time?

For primary students, work set daily which is outlined in the Home Learning plan sent out by each year group, indicates the tasks to be completed. The amount is appropriate to the age of the child.

At secondary, teachers will aim to set a similar amount of work as would be covered during a lesson, and for any subsequent homework. That would mean that most students should be completing around six or seven hours a day of work at home. Clearly, they will have more flexibility around when that happens, but we would encourage them to maintain similar work hours to the existing school day.

Will work that students produce during this time be marked or assessed?

Where possible teachers will provide feedback. We will ask teachers to be as clear as possible about when work will be checked and what type of feedback can be provided. Doing this remotely is not as easy as it is in person, so we ask for your patience and understanding in this area.

Will I be expected to print off electronic resources?

No. Teachers will try to avoid setting work or sharing resources that cannot be completed on a screen.

Will planned trips, visits or events continue?

No. During the period of school closures, all planned school activity will cease.

My child tells me they can't log-on to school systems. Who do I contact?

In the first instance at Elstow, please use Class Dojo to inform us of this. Class teachers have details of pupil log-ins for Purple Mash, TT Rock Stars, Spelling Shed SAT's Companion which are the key sites for our students.

At BFS, please use the following contacts for any problems:

Pupil IT and ShowMyHomework:

1. Mrs Logan	01234 332290 or 07594 249851
2. Mr Moore	01234 332272 or 07377 232241

Help is also available on the ShowMyHomework site: help.teamsatchel.com

For both schools, please email questions@advantageschools.co.uk if you have no other method of resolving this. You will need to clearly state your child's name and class or tutor group.

I am unsure what work my child should do. Who do I contact?

Before contacting teachers, please make sure that your child is following the instructions they have been given and have logged into ShowMyHomework or Class Dojo.

In most cases, pupils will be advised what they should do by their teacher. If this has not happened, or if you are unsure, please email the teacher directly. Should you not receive a response within two working days, please feel free to repeat, but we will be giving staff time off in lieu of their Easter break and we know some colleagues will be affected themselves.

My child is due to sit their GCSEs or SATs this summer. What is going to happen about their qualifications?

The government has confirmed that they will not go ahead with exams this academic year. They will be working with OFQUAL to ensure students get the qualifications they need. We know that this will be a very worrying and uncertain time for our Year 11 pupils and we will update you as soon as we have more information. I spoke to Year 11 this morning at BFS to inform them of everything I could and to answer questions.

When schools and colleges run again, we will follow the government's and OFQUAL's advice. However, we will liaise with secondary schools and sixth forms in order to ensure they know the grades we believe that pupils will have received. We will work closely with you to ensure you are updated. We understand that the government is due to make a further announcement tomorrow (Friday).

My child is entitled to Free School Meals. I am worried about the cost of feeding them during this period of closure.

The government have announced plans to continue to provide meals for pupils eligible. While we wait for a government plan to emerge we are attempting to take this on ourselves.

My child is becoming very worried and anxious. I'm concerned about their well-being. What can I do?

The following are useful sources of information:

Bedfordshire CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services):

CAMHS Crisis Team – 01234 310952

Single Point of Entry (Referrals) – 01234 310040

LAC and Eating Disorders Team – 01234 311136 or 01234 310670

Neurodevelopmental Team – 01234 310669

Bedford Team – 01234 310670

Managing our Mental Health & Staying Well during a Virus Outbreak

Mind have created a guide for people to advise them on ways of managing our mental health during a virus outbreak. Please see link to the guide below.

<https://www.mind.org.hk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ResponseCoronavirusENG6.2.2020-.pdf>

I think my child's teacher is on Facebook or Twitter – should I contact them?

No. We have explicitly instructed staff not to use social media to communicate with parents or wider members of the school community. We have asked them not to respond if approached, so please do not be offended if you receive no response. You may of course communicate with the school's official Facebook page.

I have heard that another school is using a different approach. I don't understand why you can't do the same.

Please bear with us. The situation is unique, and schools will be learning a lot during this period about how best to work in this way. Schools and teachers also have varying types of software, resources and skill levels available to draw upon. We will be monitoring good practice throughout this time, and will contact you should alternative or new approaches be called upon or introduced.

How will you tell me when the situation changes?

We will use the usual e-mail methods as well as updating our websites and our social media feeds.

This is as much as we know right now and we appreciate your continued patience as we deal with this ever-changing situation. We understand that this latest news will have an impact on you and your family and it's far from ideal, but we'll continue to keep in touch with any updates as the situation develops.

If you want to get in touch to share any concerns or if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to do so via questions@advantageschools.co.uk

And remember: if you or your child feels ill and you want to know what to do next, please use NHS 111 online.

At all times we will be guided by the latest advice from the government, Public Health England and the local authorities.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your patience and understanding and your good wishes.

Very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Lock', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Stuart Lock
CEO
Advantage Schools