

20th March 2020

Dear Parents,

Thank you to those who contacted me by 5pm today to make sure I have a full list of contacts. A group email seems a good way to keep in regular contact with you and to make sure messages do not get mixed.

Firstly, a sincere thank you to you all for your understanding, kindness and support during a really really tough two weeks. I hope you are all healthy and happy and we can begin working together to get through the next period as smoothly and sanely as possible.

I think it helpful to split the next few months into three separate periods of time:

1. The immediate
2. The Easter Holidays
3. The Summer Term

The majority of this email will deal with number 1. There are some certainties I can lay out, but thanks to the muddled, fluid nature of the situation/government communication, there may still be some grey areas. I apologise for this.

Firstly, **school is closed for the INSET days (today and Monday)**. I am sure you all had provision in place for these dates because they were set at the beginning of the academic year.

Right, now the good stuff...

The official advice (which was published ludicrously late last night) and a FAQ is available here and here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

The 'closure' of all schools was announced on Wednesday the 18th. From tonight, all schools, colleges and early years settings are closed. In addition, all exams are cancelled for this academic year. The closure of schools has been ordered to prevent the further spread of Covid-19.

What I am sure has kept the Mugginton Parents' WhatsApp Group on fire today is the widespread reporting of schools being kept open for the children of key workers. This was emblazoned across the news before Headteachers had any idea of who the key workers were "supposed" to be, which made a difficult job even harder.

The reality is that schools have been ordered to close to enable social distancing. However, schools have been "asked" to open to provide care for key workers' children and those in a vulnerable position, when necessary.

In other words, there is no statutory requirement for schools to open; quite the reverse. Schools which do open for a small group of children are at liberty to decide the nature of the care on offer. It is important to remember that children in school next week are not there to be educated; rather they are being cared for whilst their parents/carers work. Finally, schools are responsible for offering places to pupils who may be eligible to attend this provision and, in some cases, we will have to prioritise offers to families according to capacity, need and health advice.

The expectation, however, is that parents find ways to keep children at home.

'Many parents working in these critical sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home.'

'Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.'

It is also important to remember that this is an offer to parents. There is no requirement for parents and carers to send their children to school if they do not need or wish to do so.

I am sure you have all seen the list of key workers which was published late last night. It is exceptionally broad and poses significant challenges for schools. In simplest terms, we have been ordered to close for a lengthy spell but 'asked' to look after the children of parents whose jobs fall into one of several broad, ill-defined categories. My belief is that we can only open to look after children in so far as it is safe and reasonable to do so.

The knock-on effect of opening the school to some children next Tuesday would be significant. All staff apart from Mr Clarke have children. If we are to open, my children would have to come to Mugginton with me (I am unwilling to make the demand on their school for them to be looked after during a school closure). The same is true for Mrs Jones, Mrs Wallen, Mrs Sweeney and Mrs Horobin. A situation which requires children from other schools to be brought in to Mugginton so we can care for your children is about as far from social distancing as it is possible to get!

Due to our size, staffing becomes difficult. Lone worker legislation and good practice dictates that one member of staff should not be left alone in school with children except for short periods when it is unavoidable. Therefore a situation where two members of staff are required to come in to school to look after one or two children is a possibility. Unless this were entirely unavoidable, it is not a path I would like to go down.

Finally, the impact on the child must be considered. Is it really in their best interests to be left in empty schools with a skeleton staff for six hours per day?

Schools will make decisions about whether or not to open and which children to offer a space to from next week. The government has failed to provide schools with any information to support these decisions. Based upon the suggested guidance from the National Association of Headteachers and our size and staff capacity, **Mugginton would try to accommodate the needs of the following families:**

1. Pupils where either parent is a member of "NHS frontline staff" e.g. doctors and nurses
2. Pupils who have a social worker or are known to the school to be extremely vulnerable

Two families immediately spring to mind and I would be happy to discuss the situation with them or with any other parents who feel they might meet this threshold.

It is important to note that the Government has placed a requirement on key worker parents to obtain confirmation from their employer that, based on business continuity arrangements, their specific role is necessary for the continuation of this "essential" public service (it is magnificently clumsily worded!!). However, if it becomes necessary for us to open to care for a small number of children, we will do this retrospectively. It is hard to see how the NHS will be able to arrange all this by next week!

However, I would like to draw your attention again to the following from the guidelines

"Many parents working in these critical sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home. Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be."

Schools are closed, but we are doing what we can to support our families in key frontline NHS roles, given these unprecedented circumstances.

The Easter Holidays is next on the list! The government is asking schools to continue to provide some form of provision over the two-week break for the same group of pupils entitled to be in our schools next week. Schools are in discussion with Local Authorities to coordinate care options for the break.

Beyond Easter, the NAHT understand that local authorities have been tasked with coordinating a long-term approach to school care and will be working with schools to identify and "design long-term solutions". I think it unlikely we will be back in school after the Easter Break. If schools remain closed for a period beyond Easter, staff and I will prepare materials for you to use at home with your child.

I hope this answers some of the more pressing questions you have. Again, I ask for your understanding in what are impossible circumstances. Please rest assured that staff will be working from home (our major task is curriculum/subject planning) whilst Mrs Horobin and I split our time equally between school and home.

If you believe you meet the criteria for care outlined above, and have no way of caring for your child(ren) whilst you are working, please contact me by email for further discussion.

Finally, supporting your children at home. Reading remains the single most valuable shared activity you can do with your child. Please contact me if you require more reading books or recommendations. I will contact you again via email when we have more information

Thank you again for your understanding. Nil Carborundum!

Joe