

Dear Parents/Carers,

As you know, we are all facing extraordinary challenges at this time and the situation is placing pressure on all parts of society. Our staff have been doing all they can to keep our school open, since this crisis began and I would like to pay tribute to their remarkable commitment to our young people. They have been extraordinary and we will continue to play our part over the coming weeks.

We have been notified that the guidance the Local Authority agreed yesterday with the Department for Education around support for parents from Monday onwards, has been superseded and this letter outlines the current position (March 20th am).

The most recent scientific advice on how to further limit the spread of COVID-19 remains clear. The government have requested these key principles are followed:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home safely, then they should be.
2. Parents should not rely on childcare for those 'who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category'. This includes grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions.
3. Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.

The Government has requested that all schools provide **optional** care for a **limited number of children**.

From Monday, the school will continue to be open for the following groups of students **where we have capacity** to:

- Children whose parents are frontline workers.
- Those classed as what the Secretary of State described as "vulnerable children". These **could** be those who have a social worker and those with EHCPs, **but** only where it is safer for them to be at school than at home- we have a duty to limit social contact wherever possible to stop the spread of the virus.

If you have not been contacted directly by the end of today (5pm, Friday 20th March) by school to say your child is in on Monday then school is closed for your child until further notice.

The Government have also asked us to **try to remain open** through the Easter holidays and we will do our best to achieve this. Further details of this will follow and will be completely depended on staffing capacity (those staff who are well and who are not at risk due to vulnerabilities).

I hope you will recognise the difficult times schools and our staff now face. We are called on to provide emergency childcare at a time when many teachers' and support staffs' first thought will be to remain with their families and children. It is essential that we will all pull together to support our emergency services and key workers and you can do this by minimising your call on our limited reserves. **Therefore, children who can be cared for safely away from school or would be safer at home due to their medical vulnerability should remain at home at this time. I must stress, schools are closed for public health reasons and this childcare is an emergency measure only.** Please support our staff and each other by respecting the need for key workers to have priority access to appropriate childcare at this time.

It is paramount that we keep in regular contact with all our families who have a child at home during this period. **Class teachers will aim to contact ALL families at least once per week** to check on general well-being and discuss any concerns and issues – this is of course dependent on the health of the teacher.

This means you should expect contact via Class Dojo even if you do not specifically request it. We ask that you check regularly for these messages, we would respectfully request that you respond accordingly, even if this is to simply say you, your family and our student are safe and well, and that you have no issues.

Should you require support to access Class Dojo, please call the school office and request help. A member of staff will call you back as soon as possible and talk you through the process.

In the event of a safeguarding concern developing or escalating for a Heltwate School student, please contact cp@heltwate.net – a response will be forwarded as soon as possible and at the latest within 24 hours with advice and guidance as to how to proceed.

Individual contact information for members of our safeguarding team and LA contacts can also be found on the school website within the Safeguarding & Child Protection policy at the school's website address.

We will also be able to provide a 'packed lunch' to our pupils who currently receive Free School Meals until the government establish their proposed food voucher system. **These have to be collected from Heltwate, Bretton on the day between 11.30 – 12noon.** If your child is eligible, and you require a packed lunch, **you need to call the school office by 4pm the day before** and then make arrangements to collect this from Heltwate, Bretton, PE3 8RL.

I want to reiterate the key message about the closure plans: **Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.** We absolutely understand that families are worried about being able to work but these are extraordinary times and we are all having to make some very difficult decisions and sacrifices. However, with the challenges we face with our own staff and the national social distancing policy, we wish to minimise any risks and the number of students attending should only be in circumstances where it is essential. This remains an ever-changing situation and the position may well change again in the future. We will continue to update you as the need arises.

In the meantime, I would once again like to take this opportunity to thank you wholeheartedly for your understanding and ongoing support in helping us to manage this unprecedented situation.

Kind regards,

Alison Ashworth
(Deputy Headteacher)