

20 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Covid-19 Update - School Closure

As you know we are all facing extraordinary challenges at this time and the situation is placing pressure on all parts of society. Staff have been doing an amazing job so far and it appears that it will only get tougher. I would like to thank parents who have given us their backing and support. It is greatly appreciated.

As you may be aware, the Government made several very important decisions on Wednesday evening (18th March) about schools. We now know a little more detail about how to proceed.

The first thing is that the Government has advised schools in England to close, except for certain groups of children, from this Friday afternoon (20th March) onwards as a further measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. No date has been set for when schools will re-open for all students. Schools are no longer 'schools'. We are really moving into general childcare provision and parents should be aware that formal lessons will cease. Some learning will take place but it will be a very different process now. The building will be open from 8-4 Monday to Friday for the time being. If full lockdown comes into force then this will change.

From Monday, the school will continue to be open for all the following groups of students;

- Children whose parents are frontline workers – the Government has initially said these will include NHS staff, police, fire, prison staff, transport workers, finance workers, oil/water/sewerage workers, postal services, teachers and social workers, local government officials, food production and delivery, pharmacists. This list is not exhaustive and if you believe you qualify then please ask. We may ask to see proof of your employment. Please do not be offended. The full list is here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>
- Those classed as what the Secretary of State described as vulnerable children. These would be those who have a social worker and those with current EHCPs. Please note, just because your child is deemed vulnerable, it doesn't mean you HAVE TO send them in. If you can keep them away then please do. They are safer at home.

PLEASE NOTE – IF ONE PARENT IS NOT A KEY WORKER THEN WE WOULD EXPECT CHILDREN TO STAY AT HOME WITH THAT PARENT/CARER IN THE INTERESTS OF PUBLIC HEALTH. Please do not try and take advantage of this difficult situation.

For students in these groups, we have also been asked to try to remain open through the Easter holidays and we will do our best to achieve this. From Monday 23rd March and throughout this period our school will provide care for these children. As soon as I have more information on the above groups I will share it with you. I requested information from you about whether you felt you were a key worker but we haven't had much response yet.

If your child is not in the vulnerable category or you are not a designated key worker then **DO NOT** send them to school on Monday, they will be sent home. If we think you could be better serving the public by keeping children at home then we will ask. Please don't be offended; we are trying to do the best for everyone.

I hope you will recognise the difficult times schools and teachers now face. We are called on to provide emergency childcare at a time when many teachers' first instincts will be to remain with their families and children. It is essential that we all pull together to support our emergency services and key workers and you can do this by minimising your demands on our limited resources. Therefore, children who do not fall into the groups listed above should remain at home with the appropriate care. There may also be partners who work from home or other non-elderly family members who could provide childcare support. I must stress schools are closed for public health reasons and the provision we are putting in place is an emergency measure only. Please support our staff and each other by respecting the need for key workers to have access to appropriate childcare at this time. Many staff will also be caring for vulnerable members of their own families or looking out for their own health needs.

Attendance at school is no longer compulsory however we will probably ring periodically to make welfare checks.

Following the letter distributed earlier this week, I would like to remind you what we have in place to ensure students can carry on their learning at home.

Students have packs of work that they can complete. There is a host of online resources and learning platforms to access. Please see the website for more details. (Woodsideprimary.co.uk)

Children do not need to slavishly work through all these resources. They do not need to work from 9-3 every day. It is very much up to you as parents to oversee and do what you feel is right. If your child does no work from now until summer then that is your decision. It would be very sad though to think you would want your child to be at a disadvantage when normal service is resumed. Therefore we do encourage you take on your responsibility as parents. If this situation continues in its present form then more work could be provided in due course.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

In terms of safeguarding we are continuing to monitor the safety and welfare of our students. Should you have any concerns during the period of closure you should e-mail senco.woodside@halton.gov.uk or head.woodside@halton.gov.uk or text on 07395 126470 (this is different from our group SMS service)

This account will be monitored regularly during the closure period. Please note staff will not be expected to respond to these e-mails during the scheduled Easter break. Therefore, from **3pm on Friday 3rd April until 8am on Monday 20th April**, staff will not be expected to reply to e-mails to this account.

You can also contact the Local Authority ICART team on 0303 3334300 or the Social Care Duty team on 0345 050 0148. Please use these numbers during the Easter break.

Further safeguarding information is available on the website using the link below;
<https://www.woodsideprimary.co.uk/safeguarding> or on the Halton Borough Council website

<https://localoffer.haltonchildrenstrust.co.uk/children-services-social-care/>

Free Schools Meals and Food Provision

As you are aware, we are part of the magic breakfast programme who provide bagels and cereal for all our students. This will continue as much as possible for children who are attending school. This will run from 8.00am until 8.30am until further notice. In due course we may be able to provide some sort of service to children who are isolating or away from school and we will inform you when we know more.

Those students who may be in school and are entitled to a free school meal will be provided with a meal, probably a packed lunch. I have no idea what sort of choice there will be as yet. Children who normally pay for a meal can still do so or children can bring a packed lunch. Those students who receive a free school meal but who are not in school will be able to collect one from the school between 11 and 1pm. We have been informed that packed lunches will be available to children who are not in school. We will let you know how this will be organised as clearly we don't want people in isolation coming into school.

It will only be Pupil Premium children who qualify for a free meal now. This particularly applies to infants who up till now have all been entitled. This is now not the case. Only children whose parents are in receipt of certain benefits are now entitled to a free meal, regardless of age. Check with Joanne if unsure.

The second key Government announcement is that tests and exams will not take place this summer. For children and young people who have worked so hard to prepare for their SATs, this may be upsetting, and we sympathise with them. My advice is not to worry too much about SATS grades as they are mainly used for setting in Y7 and will be of little concern as children move through later year groups.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that our text service and our social media accounts will be used as the official method of communication during the period of closure to ensure reliable and clear communication from the school.

Website: woodsideprimary.co.uk

Twitter: @RuncornWoodside

Facebook: Woodside Primary

Finally, 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. The bottom line is that children at home are safer than children at school. Bear this in mind when deciding what to do next week. Please be patient and understanding with us as we navigate through completely uncharted waters.

Yours faithfully,

RE Collings
Head Teacher