



AKELEY WOOD  
SCHOOL

**18<sup>th</sup> March 2020**

## **Covid-19 - School Closure**

Dear Parents and Guardians

As you will be aware, the Government has this afternoon announced the closure of all schools in England from the end of Friday 20 March due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Our school premises will continue as normal tomorrow and Friday. The Easter term will still end on Friday 3 April and we are planning on Summer term commencing as previously advised on Tuesday 21 April, whether physically at school or virtually.

We are exploring the means by which we could offer supervised care for the children of key workers. Please let me know tomorrow, Thursday 19 March (via [kim.thornley@akeleywoodschoo.co.uk](mailto:kim.thornley@akeleywoodschoo.co.uk) or [Nikki.gowton@akeleywoodschoo.co.uk](mailto:Nikki.gowton@akeleywoodschoo.co.uk) if you feel you may fall into this category and we will confirm details shortly.

I appreciate this news is unsettling but want to reassure you of the steps we are taking to provide support for our students and parents during the closure. As you know, we've been working closely with our Cognita colleagues in Asia, where some countries have had mandatory school closures for many weeks and also more recently in Spain and Switzerland. Our plan for Akeley Wood School is informed by the practice they've put in place and we are confident we have an effective strategy for our children to continue learning. We have recently refreshed the digital technology in our school and conducted training in its use which means our teaching staff are well equipped to make the transition to digital learning for your child.

The academic teams at both the Junior and Senior Schools will be in touch over the next two days with specific details about their online learning programme, which will be delivered via Microsoft Teams. Clearly this will be a new way of working and learning for us all and we expect to adapt the programme as we go. As confirmed in the Education Secretary's briefing there will be no public exams held this year. We appreciate the enormity of this announcement and will communicate further with affected parents and pupils on this shortly as more exact information becomes available. As I said in previous communications, my own daughter in Year 13 is feeling the effects of this news. I also am acutely aware of the impact on her mental health as she and I remain in limbo in terms of university places etc. I can therefore totally sympathise with you all - but I do ask that, as I am with my daughter's school, that you continue to place your trust in us to keep you informed when we find out more detail ourselves.

We appreciate that there will be an impact on parents and our plan includes advice for you. With that in mind, our Group Wellbeing Director Beth Kerr has prepared the attached 'Be Well Tips' for parents on supporting your child during a school closure.

Thank you in advance for your support at this challenging time. Our teachers have been preparing well for the possibility of a closure. All our efforts are concentrated on two priorities: maintaining the wellbeing of our children and staff and ensuring the continuity of their education in the days or weeks to come.

I have to tell you how proud I am of the resilience and commitment demonstrated by the entire staff at all three schools. Teaching staff are being asked to 'triple up' on workload – preparing, delivering, assessing conventional lessons, preparing resources for remote and online learning and finally, covering lessons for absent colleagues. Support and Non-teaching staff have had to contend with exceptionally high increases in workload as capacity and staffing levels decrease in an unprecedented fashion.

Some parents have asked why we are launching 5 days of remote learning before moving to online learning and not launching online learning immediately. The reasons for this are as follows: we want the online learning to 'hit the ground running' and not be spending the first few days firefighting technical or delivery issues. Secondly, teachers have family / childcare and domestic situations to reorganise also and I have to give them a fair chance to achieve the right environment to deliver the best possible lessons for your children. This is a lesson we have learnt from our partner schools in Asia.

The usual channels of communication, including Tutors, Heads of Year, SENCO, Heads of Department, Class Teachers and SLT at all three schools will remain in place, so do keep in touch. Please understand that staff working routines may also be impacted by arrangements relating to the outbreak, e.g. self-isolating or acting as carers for their families. There will be regular communication from us during the closure, via email/website/social media to help keep a sense of community and provide further information.

The link below will give you access to all the latest communications:

<https://www.akeleywoodschool.co.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/>

Please be patient with all my colleagues if you do not receive immediate replies or new systems have teething problems; trying to provide learning for a range of family circumstances, across all subjects, abilities and ages will undoubtedly cause some initial challenges.

Please do not hesitate to contact me personally at [simon.antwis@akeleywoodschool.co.uk](mailto:simon.antwis@akeleywoodschool.co.uk) if you have any further questions.

Kind regards,

**Simon Antwis**

**Principal**