

Dear Parents/Carers

You will, of course, have seen the Secretary of State for Education's announcement that all schools in England are to close with effect from the end of the week. I thought that you would appreciate an update from me on what this means for your children.

From Monday 23rd March until further notice

The school will be closed to the vast majority of pupils and staff from Monday, 23rd March until further notice. We will continue to set work via SIMS Student, as previously advised. For the first few weeks, this work will focus on retrieving and consolidating previously learned work – a technique which we have been advocating for the past couple of years and which has been shown by educational research to be highly effective. However, I am acutely aware that if this closure stretches into the summer, we will need to find a technological solution which allows us to deliver new content to students remotely. There are a number of such solutions available to us and I will keep you informed as the days and weeks go by.

Children of Key Workers and Vulnerable Students

The Prime Minister spoke in his press conference yesterday evening about his desire for schools to remain partially open for the children of key workers and for vulnerable students. (We have been promised a definition of 'key workers' at some stage today). I think that this message is mainly aimed at primary schools where, clearly, childcare issues are more pressing. However, we are prepared to offer this facility out to parents of children in the groups mentioned above. We will contact parents of those children in the latter group personally but, if you fall into the 'key worker' group AND you would like to continue sending your child(ren) into school, could I please ask you to email: office@walton.staffs.sch.uk

(We already have emails from a small number of parents, so there is no need to re-send an email unless you have changed your mind).

You will need to balance the benefits of your children being supervised against the risks of increased social contact, but we will guarantee to provide a skeleton staff for as long as we are able to, assuming staff are healthy. I need to make you aware that we will not be teaching students in the usual way; we will be supervising them doing the same online work as their peers. If you do send your children in, there is no need for them to attend in school uniform.

Public Examinations

One of the most shocking announcements for me last night was the cancellation of public examinations. This has, quite frankly, left me with more questions than answers. I have no idea at this stage whether exams will be postponed until September or whether they will be scrapped altogether and be replaced by predicted grades. I am hoping for some urgent clarification from Ofqual and the government. I am, of course, acutely conscious that this news will have been massively upsetting and unsettling for our Year 13 and Year 11 students in particular. My heart goes out to them that they have invested so much time and effort and it has come to this! I will be seeing them all this morning to try to offer reassurances (to the best of my ability) and to answer their questions. With specific reference to Year 11, we will accept all applicants into our Sixth Form whom we believe would meet our entry criteria. We will be more than happy to discuss individual cases but I want to provide this security that their educational future is safe. For those students applying to College or apprenticeships, I will provide a positive reference in order to do my best to secure their places.

I have no idea how long this closure will last but, given the announcement on cancelling exams, it is entirely possible that this week could be the final week for Year 11 and Year 13 students. Traditionally, we have leavers' assemblies for these year groups and I am proposing that we try to run a 'scaled back' version of these tomorrow afternoon. We are happy for Year 11 students to bring a spare shirt to sign and we will attempt to replicate the 'rite of passage' assemblies for both year groups. I am aware that we could be back in school next term and, if that is the case, we will hold more traditional assemblies at the appropriate time. However, as stated previously, I fear that events will overtake us.

A final word on our examination groups. They MUST carry on working. They CANNOT assume that exams will not take place. Government advice is quickly superseded in this rapidly evolving environment. Furthermore, it is my view that education is about so much more than exams. If something is worth teaching, it is worth learning and the last thing I want is for our examination groups to switch off. Please, please reinforce this vital message at home.

Free School Meals

I will write separately to update you on the free school meal situation. However, whether it be provision of a meal at school or provision of vouchers, we will be honouring this commitment.

Student Welfare

We will set plenty of work in the coming weeks and I will ensure that this continues to flow through. We will set up a dedicated email address for you to contact if you are struggling to access work. However, it is my view that children need a lot more than

education in these unsettling times. I do not believe that sitting for six hours in front of a computer screen non-stop will be in children's best interests. With regard to my own secondary aged children, I will be ensuring that they work for a period of time each day but also that they have time to exercise, to read, to listen to music, to relax and to engage in family activities. I strongly urge you to adopt a similar, flexible approach in these uncertain times.

Finally, I would like to thank you all for your support. It has been truly heartening to receive supportive emails. I promise you that we will continue to work hard for your children throughout this crisis.

Yours sincerely

Mr N D Finlay
Headteacher