

20th March 2020

To: All employees of Reach South Academy Trust
Subject: COVID-19 2019-nCoV, Coronavirus

Dear Colleagues,

Today we will close our schools until further notice. The Government has now assessed that in order to slow down the spread of Covid-19 in the UK, the time has come to close schools for 90% of all children. When the Secretary of State announced this on Wednesday afternoon, he also announced what the new roles for schools will be during this emergency period. That statement was based on a simple overwhelming principle. If we all did nothing and let this virus run its course, hundreds of thousands of British citizens are going to die. The vast majority will be our elderly and vulnerable. It is not inevitable that we have to let so many of our parents, grandparents and vulnerable friends and family have to succumb to Covid-19. If we all pull together and work to ensure that key workers are kept available to give the necessary medical attention to those who catch it; and work to stop them catching it in the first place until a vaccine is available – then we can significantly reduce that mortality rate.

So, the Secretary of State for Education made a significant set of announcements in the House on Wednesday afternoon:

- Schools in England will close at the end of the day on Friday until further notice, in order to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.
- There will be no SATs, GCSEs, BTECs or A-Levels this summer; the government will be issuing guidance on how young people will still be able to receive qualifications at a later date.
- Provisions will be made to support children on free school meals which will include providing vouchers or credits to eligible families
- Schools will have a new role to provide care for:
 - the children of key workers
 - children with ECHPs
 - children with an assigned social worker

Around 10% of the school population fall into these categories. Covid-19 does not respect our holidays and so we will make provision for these children during the Easter holidays so that their parents can continue in our collective determination to save as many of our people as we possibly can.

On Monday morning all of us that are able to do so and not either self-isolating under the current government guidance or already identified as working from home, will report for work in our schools as normal. At the start of next week we will be available for the children of key workers and our most vulnerable children. We expect that to be only around 10% of the

children but at this stage we cannot be certain. We will use the time next week to both care, engage and stimulate those children as well as plan for the coming weeks. I anticipate that as we get a clearer picture of how many children of key workers that we will be looking after, we will move to a second phase of staff being in schools on a rota basis and the rest of the time homeworking to continue to provide the educational materials for the 90% of our pupils that will be at home.

One concern for many of us will be what do I do with my own young children when I have to work in school? When education staff are working in school they are key workers, whatever that job may be. The guidance for parents who are critical workers is: if it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be; parents should not rely for childcare upon those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends or family members with underlying conditions. However, if you have to come into work and you cannot leave your own school-aged children safely at home or with appropriate childcare then you can bring your own children into your Reach South setting. If you prefer, as a key worker, to drop your children off at their usual school then you will need to contact that school to ensure that they are able to take them. However, if you would prefer to bring them with you to your Reach South school, then that is fine, though please discuss with your Headteacher in advance. Remember that the self-isolation guidance does also include children with underlying health conditions.

Thank you all again for your professionalism and your amazing ability to quickly adapt to our new role. We are not only going to keep our children safe during this extraordinary period; we are going to do everything we can to reduce their anxiety and fears and keep them smiling; we are also going to use our creativity and expertise to keep them stimulated, engaged and learning. To do that we have to keep ourselves safe and healthy. Please be constantly vigilant to look after yourselves and take all necessary steps not to put yourselves in unnecessary risky situations.

With very best wishes,



Dean Ashton
CEO Reach South Academy Trust