



30th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Update 4 from Aurora

I promised to keep in regular contact with you about the ongoing *Coronavirus Covid-19* situation and about Aurora's response to the current national emergency.

Last week (23rd - 27th March) all of our schools set up and operated childcare provision for our most vulnerable children and the children of other Keyworkers. Thank you if you were able to make alternative arrangements for childcare, even though you may be a parent of children in these categories. In the vast majority of cases, children are better off staying at home; because that will limit the spread of the virus and reduce the number of children we have to look after in our schools, which in turn means that we can reduce the numbers of staff needed on any one day to run the provision safely and effectively. I have been in regular contact with our Headteachers and am aware that these arrangements are working very well indeed.

Last Friday (27th March) I was immensely proud of the fact that our primary schools (King Offa, Glenleigh Park, Heron Park, Oakwood and City Academy Whitehawk) provided and distributed food packs for every child entitled to free school meals – there was enough food in the packs to provide a meal per day, for each child, for a period of 10 days. Most of these packs were either picked up at school by parents/carers or, in some instances, delivered to doorsteps by school staff and volunteers. In total, Aurora Academies Trust distributed food packs with sufficient food to make almost 7,000 meals. We are grateful to our Caterers *Harrison's* for sourcing the food and to some of the national supermarket chains, who donated some additional food items and *Bags for Life*. I must also commend our staff who made a Herculean effort to organise the logistics and to place the food into the packs. The only difference in approach was at The Gatwick School because it currently does not have kitchen facilities, but which met its responsibilities by ensuring that all children entitled to Free School Meals were able to receive a daily lunch pack. This was a truly magnificent achievement and I have been informed by our Headteachers that this Free School Meal provision has been very well received by our communities. From early next week the Government will introduce a National Free School Meals Voucher System and, once we know the details of how these will be sent to parents, our schools will send messages directly to those parents whose children are entitled to receive the vouchers.

The current provision at each school for a small number of children will run throughout the Easter Holidays, with the exception of Good Friday and Bank Holiday Monday, when all of Aurora's schools will be closed. It will then continue after the Easter Holidays. Whilst it is difficult to make accurate predictions about this current situation, I am taking my cue from Sunday's advice from Government

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that it is most likely that the country will not get back to 'normal' for many weeks, and possibly months, and therefore I wanted to prepare everybody for this scenario, just in case anybody is assuming that schools would be reopening for all children after the Easter Holidays. It is likely that all UK schools will stay closed for a considerable period of time and therefore it is vital that the Trust (and its schools) keeps in regular two-way communication with you over the next few weeks.

The prospect of a much longer closure of schools than was first thought, presents many logistical and educational challenges; not only for children, parents and carers but also for our school leaders and staff. All of our schools have already sent home educational work packs for all pupils, at an age appropriate level, and have also signposted many online resources that parents/carers can access to provide additional educational support for all children. At the moment your feedback would suggest that most of you are happy with what your child's school has provided. However, thinking longer term, we are now looking at how our schools can realistically sustain this provision of ongoing resources/activities for your child(ren) to complete at home, at a time when we also anticipate that our own staff numbers will naturally reduce over time because of the virus. Please look out for further communication from your school and please also bear with us throughout this period – this whole situation is unique and our staff (who are all designated Keyworkers themselves) are also experiencing many of the stresses and everyday disruption to their own lives that all of you face. You have been magnificent in your support of our staff so far and I would ask for that to be maintained. Please rest assured that our staff are going *above and beyond* to help provide educational support to all children and families, as well as helping to provide childcare in school for the identified groups.

Despite the successes of the past week, may I reiterate the message that I included in my Update 3 Letter to you on 24th March: the Government's advice is for parents/carers **not to send their child to school** unless they are either a Keyworker who genuinely cannot make any other arrangements for their child's care, or in the very small number of cases where a vulnerable child cannot be cared for at home. Please continue to follow the Government's directive, which is for everybody to stay at home, unless a Keyworker going to work, shopping for essential items or taking a daily exercise. Please continue to practise social distancing by keeping at least 2 metres away from other people, if at all possible. This is vital if we are to stop this virus from spreading; which in turn will save lives.

We all need to support each other. Please continue to take care of yourselves and your loved ones.

With my very best wishes to you all

Tim McCarthy
CEO, Aurora Academies Trust

