



17th April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Update 5 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.

As you know, all of our six schools remain open for childcare both of Keyworkers' children plus some other vulnerable groups of children, and that provision has run throughout the 'official' Easter holiday period. I am indebted to all of our staff who have willingly continued to work in shifts to provide this much needed support to our communities, which has enabled other Keyworkers to continue to do their jobs.

For those children who are entitled to free school meals (FSM), the Government has now introduced the national free school meals voucher system. I am aware that there have been some technical issues experienced by some of our families while trying to access their vouchers, however I can assure you that these were not due to any school errors. Instead the company providing the vouchers, *Edenred*, have been experiencing problems, due to the high national demand. At the time of writing this letter, I believe that most of these issues have been sorted but, if not, they should be sorted very soon indeed. The national voucher scheme is for registered FSM children only and I am afraid that it does not cover the Universal Free Meals system, usually provided in school for all children in Key Stage 1, which has been suspended during the closure period.

All of Aurora's schools have been providing educational support and resources for children and they will continue to do so during the enforced UK schools' closures. I have been particularly impressed with the range of innovative methods our staff have been using to do this, some of which have included: staff filming themselves reading stories to their classes and posting these online; providing formal online classroom teaching, mainly for our secondary aged students; sending home resource packs of books and activity sheets and; providing signposts to many external online resources and websites that provide additional activities for children. I hope that you have found these resources to be useful?

In my recent CEO video message to you, I emphasised the important role that you as parents and carers can play in supporting your child at home. However, I wish to repeat one key point that I stressed in that message, which is that we do not expect you 'magically' to become a teacher overnight! What is much more important for your child(ren) is the time that you can spend with them, perhaps listening to them read or count, spotting patterns, painting, cooking, listening to music and/or helping them to play a musical instrument, or by simply doing a daily PE workout

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together. Having a daily structure to engage in meaningful family activities provides children with reassurance in these uncertain times, plus it will have the added benefit of preparing them for an eventual return to school.

On the subject of when schools might reopen fully once again, we all need to remain mindful of the likely long-term nature of the current national emergency. Last night the Government announced an extension to the current national 'lockdown' for 'at least' another three weeks. The spread of the virus has clearly not yet reached its peak and it will be a good while before the medical evidence supports an easing of the lockdown situation, let alone advising when schools might reopen. Despite current speculation by some political figures (as reported widely in the press and on social media) I must inform you that schools simply cannot reopen fully, until it is deemed safe for them to do so. I am responsible for almost 3,000 children and 400 staff in all of our schools and, within those numbers, there are many children and staff who are currently self-isolating because they (or a family member) have symptoms of the virus. In addition, there is a small but significant number of staff who are following the Government's advice to undertake a 12 week 'shielding isolation' because they have underlying health issues. Given the parallel need for everybody to practise 'social distancing' to slow down any spread of *Covid-19*, then there are far too many risks, both to children and staff, to contemplate an early return date for opening our schools. It is therefore much more likely that schools will remain closed for a long time yet, before even a phased return can be considered. I apologise if this is not the news that some of you would wish to hear but I feel it needs to be stated, because ultimately my job is to ensure that every child and every adult in all of our schools, remains safe and well. I hope you will understand and support this.

Please continue to bear with us at this time. We recognise how difficult it is for parents and carers right now – please remember that many of us are also parents ourselves, so we do understand. Our staff are doing all that they can to support you and your child(ren) and will continue to do so.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and your loved ones.

Together we can get through this.

With my very best wishes to you all

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