

Message on behalf of:

Essex County Council

The Association of Secondary Headteachers in Essex

Essex Primary Headteacher Association

Essex Special Schools Education Trust

Dear Parents,

### **Corona Virus – how schools are operating**

Across Essex, Head Teachers are working extremely hard to continue to keep schools open in these unprecedented times. You will be aware that the government has now moved from the containment phase to the delay phase with regards to the virus and has released new advice around self-isolation and vulnerable groups of people.

The impact for schools of this new advice means that many staff are affected by the self-isolation policy, in the same way that families are also impacted. This means that Head Teachers are dealing with higher than usual levels of staff absence at the current time, as per the new guidance.

We want to reassure you that Head Teachers' key priorities are the safety, welfare and wellbeing of your children and young people and their first job is to ensure that schools continue to be safe places for your children and young people, whilst they remain open. Therefore, with a significant number of staff absent, it may become impossible to continue to run schools as normal. For this reason, it may become necessary to partially or fully close schools, even if the government has not made a decision to close all schools. Schools will do everything to avoid a full closure, however if staff levels are too low to ensure children are safe, schools will be left with no choice but to consider this option

### **What partial closure may look like – some of the strategies that might be used**

- Parents who are able to keep children at home may be asked to do so
- Specific year groups or classes may be asked to stay at home
- The school day may be shortened
- Online resources may be made available for children not in school, to use where possible
- Parents will be clearly informed by the school of any changes and guidance
- Schools will continue to work with other agencies as appropriate to keep children safe and will confirm any safeguarding arrangements with parents

- Your child's school will give you clear guidance about how a partial closure will operate and how it will affect your child.

### **What full closure may look like**

- Parents will be clearly and directly informed by the school when a full closure will begin
- Online resources will be made available for children to use from home where possible and practical, but pupils will not be penalised if they are unable to access online learning
- The school building will be closed to pupils, their families and other members of the public
- Schools will continue to work with other agencies as appropriate to keep children safe and will confirm any safeguarding arrangements with parents

### **Actions Head Teachers are taking to keep schools open for as long as possible**

- All staff will continue to come to work as long as they are fit and able to do so
- Cleaning has been increased and everyone in the school community is encouraged to be careful about handwashing and hygiene
- Classes may be merged or sizes increased
- Teaching and/or support staff may be redeployed to cover classes and safeguard vulnerable children
- Class trips will be cancelled for the remainder of the term
- After school clubs and non-essential school activity may also be cancelled, such as music tuition
- The school pick up time may be staggered to avoid large groups of parents gathering at the school gate

### **Self-isolation**

A reminder that the advice around self-isolation has changed and is now:

- If any member of a household shows symptoms the advice is that the **whole household** should self-isolate for **14 days**.
- Women who are pregnant have been advised to avoid social contact where possible

### **What is self-isolation?**

It is very important that individuals with symptoms that may be due to coronavirus and their household members stay at home. Staying at home will help control the spread of the virus to friends, the wider community, and particularly the most vulnerable.

If you or another member of your household have symptoms of coronavirus, then all household members must stay at home and not leave the house for 14 days. If possible, you should not go out even to buy food or other essentials, other than exercise, and in that case at a safe distance from others. The 14-day period starts from the day when the first person in the house became ill.

For anyone in the household who starts displaying symptoms, they need to stay at home for 7 days from when the symptoms appeared, regardless of what day they are on in the original 14-day isolation period.

### **What you can do to help**

- Follow the self-isolation advice for yourself and your children and young people
- Regularly check your school's usual communication channels, such as emails, Parentmail and social media pages
- Keep up to date with government advice
- Please collect children and leave the school site promptly, without gathering in close contact with others

**Schools are working closely with the Local Authority and the Headteacher Associations in order to offer a consistent and safe response to the current crisis. The health and safety of your children is everyone's first priority.**

Kind Regards,



Clare Kershaw, Director of Education