

Mr. W. P. Carratt
Chief Executive Officer
Nexus Multi Academy Trust
Email: CEO@NexusMAT.org

Wednesday, 18 March 2020

Dear families,

School closures

Whilst I know all of our Headteachers are keeping families regularly updated in these very challenging and turbulent times, there are a number of myths and misconceptions that are being created and shared across social media about the decisions being taken throughout the state education sector which I would like to address directly. At this very worrying time for so many of us, what we need is for our families to continue to trust in the sound judgement of governors and school leaders, though I understand this can be undermined by some of the things people are reading and hearing right now.

1. Why have some schools closed and others haven't?

The very clear instruction from Government is that schools should remain open at this time. This decision has been informed by the expert advice of the Chief Medical Officer and the Chief Science Officer, both of whom are leading experts in their fields. As such, all of our academies will remain open, unless we are advised by the Government or a statutory agency -such as Public Health England or the Health Protection Agency - to close.

A small number of schools have taken the unilateral decision to close in full, on the basis of pupil welfare. It is our view that this takes choice away from families and creates more, avoidable pressure at a time when we should be working to keep things as calm and stable as possible. If the advice of the Chief Medical Officer is that children should continue to attend school and it is safe for them to do so, then we are not in a position to take an informed view to the contrary. However, parents are able to exercise choice as to whether or not they send their children to school. If schools close, this places a huge pressure on families to meet caring needs, and this could lead to essential front line staff, for example those working in the NHS, being absent from work when right now we need them providing lifesaving services to those in our society whose health is being adversely affected by COVID-19, as well as all the other people out there in need of acute medical care for other reasons.

Learning together; to be the best we can be.

2. Will schools remain open?

At any point the Government could change their approach and direct schools to close, so we are monitoring this by the hour. However, until such time as we're told otherwise, our academies will be remaining open. We can only remain open, however, as long as we can ensure the welfare of children in our care, and at this time all employers are seeing an increasing number of staff absence as people follow Government advice and take precautionary measures to isolate.

Up until now, staff absence in our schools has been broadly in line with pupil absence or lower, but it is highly likely that we will need to adopt a partial closure model in the coming days if we reach a point where we don't have enough staff to ensure children's safety. If this happens, it will be undertaken on a rolling basis with classes throughout the school having reduced provision (e.g. on Monday, year 1 classes don't come in, on Tuesday Year 1 classes return but year 2 classes don't come in etc). We may also need to mix year groups and temporarily modify our curriculum offer to keep children in school. The Headteacher of each school will determine the best model to implement, based on their local needs.

We will endeavour to plan and communicate any changes as early as possible, and I apologise in advance for the disruption this will cause families. I do, however, hope you agree that short term change is better than a long term full school closure.

3. Do children have to attend school?

The legal requirement for children to regularly attend school has not changed. However, the Government has issued more detailed guidance on their website to further define those groups more vulnerable during this Coronavirus pandemic and all parents are strongly encouraged to read this and make an informed decision as to whether they feel their child meets any of these indicators.

If they do, it is a parent's prerogative to keep their child at home as a protective, preventative measure, and all our schools have created options to allow children to continue some form of learning if they're kept at home. As stated previously, we believe it's important for parents to have a choice at this time. We will continue to provide regular phone calls for any pupils absent to check in on their wellbeing, because we care deeply for each and every pupil on our roll.

4. What is happening with exams and tests?

At the time of writing, the Government is expecting all SATs and exams to go ahead as planned. There will be consequences for any decision to delay statutory testing, and this is something the Government is keeping under review. No school can choose to cancel statutory tests and examinations, so our responsibility therefore is to ensure all of our pupils eligible for statutory testing and examinations are as well prepared as they can be.

5. How do I keep well informed at this time?

My strong advice to anyone and everyone at this time is to regularly check the Government advice on the website www.gov.uk and follow the links to their Coronavirus/COVID-19 updates. Social media can be a powerful force for good, but it can also be an unregulated medium for sharing fiction and rumour. In the first instance, if you are worried about your child please do contact their school. We can and will share factual information as and when we get it, and Headteachers are regularly writing out to families and posting updates on websites.

The term “unprecedented” is used frequently in our media, but this genuinely is an unprecedented time for many of us. At such times, it’s essential we continue to trust in the relationships we have and in the actions of public services. I am in our schools every day (symptom free, washing my hands and sanitising regularly) and I am so proud of the resilience of our staff and our children. I’m equally proud where parents have had the courage to keep their children at home where they feel this is justified by the medical guidance issued. At night, I go home to my own family – my wife and my 2-year-old and 10-month old boys – and I believe with all my heart that we’re doing the right thing for our society by keeping the choice of school on the table for you, our families.

Keep safe and happy, everyone. And please: keep in touch.

Kind regards,



Warren Carratt
Chief Executive Officer