



Bishop Vaughan Catholic School

Thursday 19th March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

As you will now be aware, following my update to you yesterday regarding the closure of schools to pupils as of 3pm tomorrow – Friday 20th March – there have since been further announcements regarding the role of schools in addressing the current crisis, as well as the key announcement that the summer series of external examinations – the GCSE and A Level examinations – has been cancelled.

Regarding the first of these announcements, we will be providing more details tomorrow, however essentially schools will be working together to provide emergency childcare for 'key workers' in the first instance. The definition of a 'key worker' agreed by the Local Authority is, at this stage, those who work for the emergency services "blue light services" e.g. NHS staff/ the Police/ the Fire Service, and also prison workers, social workers and school-based workers. This definition may be broadened at some stage, however I am sure that you will appreciate the fact that the closure of schools at this stage is to prevent rapid virus spread to the elderly and vulnerable and that continuing to bring in very large numbers of children each day would therefore be counter-productive. Schools will be working in groups to provide this emergency childcare service and I will be able to give all parents full details tomorrow. I apologise that I am unable to do so sooner; as you can appreciate, the situation is constantly evolving and details of the ways in which the Government is directing school staff to work throughout this national emergency are being assembled swiftly in order to meet need, but this particular information came through to us after the close of the school day today.

The second announcement, the cancellation of the summer examinations, has been one that has hit our pupils very hard. The announcement has not in any way been met with the jubilation that some might have expected of those about to face GCSE and A-Level exams! It is certainly one of the most significant things to have impacted on pupils' lives so far, with the 'fixed point' towards which they have been working removed from them. Very many were upset yesterday and remain so today, with comments such as:

- "This is everything we've worked towards and we will never know if it would have come to anything"
- "I didn't realise that I've probably already had my last Maths/ English/ other lesson, and that makes me really sad"
- "Everyone will think we were just 'given' qualifications instead of earning them"
- "I'll never know what it would have been like to open a proper GCSE results envelope; I was looking forward to it"

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I have met with as many pupils as I can today and will continue to do so tomorrow. Our staff have worked hard to provide reassurance to those who really need our support at this time. What we **are** able to state is that there have been assurances that pupils **will** receive qualifications and that they will be a fair reflection of their achievements. We do not know yet how information will be gathered to ensure this but I have reassured pupils that no one source of information would determine these important outcomes. Whilst prior performance will likely form a major part of any decision making by the awarding bodies, we expect that there will be recognition of the fact that young people typically make significant progress between, for example, their Christmas exams and the final GCSEs due to revision, attendance of provisions such as the Learning Zone and their very significant efforts to master exam technique. We will do everything we can to make sure that this 'expected progress' is factored in to ensure the fairest possible outcome for them. The Education Minister has also stated her commitment to ensuring that pupils **do** have a 'results envelope' experience on the days calendared in August for GCSE and A-Level outcomes.

Significantly, few were upset about the lack of a Prom, which normally features so highly in pupils' minds, but truly upset at the exams being, as they put it, "ripped away" from them. Nevertheless, whilst Proms will be postponed, we will, when it is appropriate, have significant celebrations – we hope – that will be both Proms and reunions when closure periods have ended and schools have resumed.

I have today urged all pupils not to see tomorrow as a 'School Leavers' Day'. This is important for many reasons, not least because our pupils will continue to be a part of our community in the time ahead and we will endeavour to maintain links in whatever ways we are able. Primarily, however, there have been many pupils absent from school over the past week due to displaying one or more of the symptoms for which families are being asked to self-isolate. While I can state that we have no confirmed cases of the virus in our school community at present, a number of pupils have taken this precautionary step. I am concerned that they may feel pressurised to attend school tomorrow if they view it as a 'Leaving Day' and have sent a message to state that this **should not** happen. No pupil who has been absent this week due to illness should be in school tomorrow, and we will be asking parents of any pupils in this category who do attend to pick them up. This is to ensure the health and safety of all in the school community, and that of their family members in particular who may be more vulnerable. All celebrations will take place at a later date about which I will let all relevant pupils know.

In this immensely pressurised time, Pope Francis asked that families globally prayed the Rosary together this evening (8pm our time) for the protection of families. I am aware that due to the time of this update, this has passed, but I can let you know that many in our school joined in this global Rosary and you might like to read more about this here:

<https://aleteia.org/2020/03/19/popes-message-at-rosary-for-protection-of-our-families-lets-stay-firm-in-what-really-matters/>

In this time of unprecedented worries, we have placed our worries before God, and our trust in Him. Please be assured of the prayers of all within the school for you and your families.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E. R. Pole'.

Mrs Pole
Headteacher