

20 March 2020

Dear Parents, Carers, Students, Staff and Friends of the school

As the school closes to the majority of students from today, I thought it pertinent to write to you and round off the last few weeks - which have been beyond imagination. This letter also rounds off 'normal' schooling for the vast majority of our students for the foreseeable future.

To all our students but particularly Y11 and Y13

As the situation has escalated the students have displayed a calmness and a maturity that breaks the negative stereotypes that often surround and damage the reputation of our young people. A particular mention should go to our year 13 students who left us on Wednesday and our Year 11 students who leave us today. The pandemic has abruptly cut your time at Notre Dame short and for many of you, you may be left with a feeling of frustration and perhaps slight emptiness in not being able to complete your exams. There are many questions still to be answered by the Government. In the meantime, be safe in the knowledge that you are **incredible sets of young people** that are beyond the definitions of numbers and letters and I have no doubt that each of you will go on to live out your 'life to the full'. Please keep in touch with the school and let us know of your successes! We look forward to seeing many of our year 11's in September and we are investigating how we might still be able to celebrate both of your proms at a later date in December.

Our Staff

In times of crisis we may often find ourselves reflecting on our lives and our communities. This is certainly true of the leadership team at Notre Dame, who have on a daily basis 'walked the shop floor' and been struck by the normality of teaching and learning in a school with increasingly few staff and increasingly few teachers. Normality in this sense is very much a compliment to the remaining staff and those that have been able to work remotely providing high quality cover work. It is also further praise to our students in being able to self-regulate their behaviour and pull together with staff.

Illness and Absence

I and the school have tried to promote honesty over the last month. It is the only way we can safely function and maintain the trust of everyone in the community. We are not aware of confirmed cases of the virus in either staff or students. However I must now share with you that some staff have recently fallen ill and have contacted their GPs who have advised that their symptoms match those of COVID-19. The staff will only be tested and confirmed if they have to go to hospital, which we fervently hope is unnecessary. We are very aware that testing for the virus has essentially ceased and in all likelihood the virus is far more widespread than being reported. Our staff numbers have fallen this week and there are limited staff to supervise the pupils next week as a result.

On a personal note this week my own family began to display symptoms and I had to make the very difficult decision to self-isolate. I know that there was no choice - each of us is duty bound to follow the guidance and protect the most vulnerable in society. This means I am not able to be in school for an extended period of time, and I am grateful to the Leadership Team, who I have been in constant contact with, for their support. I am as a result really sorry and sad to not be with Y11 on their final day in person.

I also need to share with you, in this spirit of honesty, that we have had increasing numbers of pupils being absent from school with symptoms. We have had to isolate several pupils as they have arrived at school, *with clear temperatures and coughs*, and call their parents to take them home. I urge you to keep your children at home if they have symptoms for their own benefit and the wider benefit of society.

This leads in to an important point regarding the provision available to the children of 'Key workers' and 'vulnerable' children. Please see the extract below from the [Government document](#) on supervision of students within school.

'If children can stay safely at home, they should, to limit the chance of the virus spreading.

*That is why the government has asked parents to keep their children at home, wherever possible, and asked schools to remain **open only for those children who absolutely need to attend.***

It is important to underline that schools, colleges and other educational establishments remain safe places for children. But the fewer children making the journey to school, and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.'

This is particularly important for those pupils who may continue to attend next week and subsequently. The children being supervised at Notre Dame will be the children of key workers and vulnerable. We must try to ensure that the virus does not infect this group, who may then cross infect their parents, who we need to keep well so that they can carry on their critical work at this time.

Supervision of Key worker children and vulnerable children

Please read the following [Government guidance documentation](#) so that everyone is clear on the expectations:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

Further guidance will be sent to any parent that has replied to yesterday's or today's emails regarding if you are eligible to send your child to Notre Dame from Monday. We have revised the guidance and questionnaire to reflect the latest Government guidance. I take this opportunity to make it clear that Notre Dame will be acting a very different role to normal. We have been placed by the LA into 'the Hewett cluster' of schools and may be required to collaborate with schools within that cluster as Local Authority plans are formalised.

Please remember that taking up a supervised place at school during this time of wider closure is the offer of last resort, for the minority of key workers, who have no safe alternative.

We will be providing further information to parents and carers who have replied to ask for supervision of their children but all should be aware:

- Staff that are available to come in and work will be asked to supervise students' **self-study**.
- There will be no 'normal' teaching.
- Students will be expected to attend in uniform. This may become more important if social distancing measures are tightened.

- There will be a reduced catering service available.
- We will attempt to provide daily exercise, students therefore are required to bring their PE kit.
- The normal high standards of behaviour are expected and are essential to the staff being able to run supervision safely and efficiently.
- We will either ask students to leave and not return if we feel their behaviour is unacceptable, or arrange to place them in a different school in the Hewett cluster. We will not have our normal pastoral capacity and it has been made clear by the Government that the provision we are offering is not education, but supervision. We will also be supervising pupils from other schools in a reciprocal manner.
- If our capacity to provide supervision drops as a result of staff illness or absence, particularly as we have certain key roles that must be legally filled, then we will have to review numbers and either prioritise places or work with other schools to enable some pupils to attend another setting in the Hewett cluster.
- If increasing illness or absence makes it impossible to continue to offer supervision at Notre Dame we will inform the Local Authority who will then work with other schools to arrange supervision for the key workers or vulnerable children from NDHS at those schools. Similarly if other schools have to close completely we may, if we have capacity, have some key worker or vulnerable pupils from other schools at Notre Dame.
- We will register pupils at the start and end of the day, please make sure you have contacted us in advance to support with supervision, we will not operate a 'drop in' system to ensure children are properly safeguarded

We are working with the Local Authority and other schools and the supervision offered will be fluid and change as the situation develops over the weeks.

Finally

I have asked our Chaplain Alex Savage to consider how we might add well-being materials to the 'weekly theme' google classroom. This may be something you wish to explore with your family as social distancing and self-isolation continues.

We will endeavour to continue to communicate with you on a regular basis, especially when we hear more from the Government. Please check the website for updates. On behalf of the school staff, we wish each of you well and we pray for every family associated with Notre Dame.

Best Wishes,

Tom Pinnington