20 March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

Further to the release of information very late last night, I am contacting you to explain the arrangements we will be able to provide from Monday, following the government's decision to close all schools.

For the vast majority of students, **all schools will be closed as of the end of the school day today (Friday 20 March) until further notice.** Students must continue to complete the remote learning set as they have been up until now. This will continue up to and following the Easter holiday.

There will be provision for our students who are children of the now defined "key workers". Parents have identified themselves in this category via our pre-released survey. Please contact us by 3.30pm today if you have not already completed this to allow us to plan at office@heathfieldcc.co.uk. After this time College will be closed and staff will not be available to pick up the message.

However, as the government has made clear, **if your child can be safely cared for at home, then they are to stay at home** even if you are a key worker. This is to cut down the spread of the virus. The educational provision at school is only for a limited number of pupils run by a skeleton staff; students will not receive taught lessons.

Key workers are deemed to be those whose specific role is vital to the COVID-19 response. The government has now provided a list of 'Key Workers' within the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision.

Please note that the guidance refers to **'essential'** workers for many of the groups. As an example, local NHS trusts have already identified groups of workers who can work from home. The guidance also clarifies 'vulnerable children'. **Vulnerable children are those who are:** supported by social care, those with safeguarding and welfare needs, those with child in need plans, those with child protection plans, 'looked after' children, young carers, disabled children, education, health and care (EHC) plans, other children facing social difficulties. If this applies to you, it is most likely that Miss Burgess or a member of our pastoral team has already been in touch.

For all students please note the guiding principles, as laid out by the government:

1. *If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be;*

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2. *If a child needs specialist support, is vulnerable or has a parent who is a critical worker, then educational provision will be available for them;*
3. *Parents should not rely on childcare from those who are advised to be in the stringent social distancing category such as grandparents, friends, or family members with underlying conditions;*
4. *Parents should also do everything they can to ensure children are not mixing socially in a way which can continue to spread the virus. They should observe the same social distancing principles as adults.*

In order to best protect both children and staff during this crisis, we will be asking that childcare is requested only where there is a 'need'. Although having one 'critical worker' in the household may qualify your child for this provision, we would expect that if there is a non-critical worker in the home capable of basic childcare during the day that guiding principle 1. should be the starting point for families. The guidance reaffirms this stance with the following statement:

> *"Many parents working in these critical sectors may be able to ensure their child is kept at home.* **Every child who can be safely cared for at home should be.***"*

We would ask that all families consider the impact on themselves, their families and others in terms of the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) before requesting this support.

College Community: For all students we will continue to try and maintain as sense of College community and communication although we would ask that this will be limited due to the nature of remote working and also due to the now dual responsibility we hold for the continuation of learning for all our students and the child care for the critical workers. Please refresh yourself of the means of communication available that we sent out earlier this week.

Free School Meals: There will be a number of children who are entitled to a free school meal who are not eligible for the childcare arrangements. You will be aware we have already provided vouchers to cover families up to the Easter holidays. There is work underway for a national voucher scheme for children whilst they are off school, but whilst this is being put in place, we are also trying to work with local agencies to see what support can be provided after Easter and how if necessary. We will update you when we know more.

Examinations: I will be in touch regarding the government announcements about the GCSE and A Level exam updates once this has been released. Once we have fully understood the implications for us and our students in these year groups, please understand that our response may not be immediate but we will endeavour to communicate as early as we can.

These are fast moving and challenging times for all of us. I know for students and staff it is hard to comprehend that we will not have the daily contact after today that we are used to and which underpins our culture. We will always be Heathfield and we know our students will do us proud at this time – we will be remotely connected and look forward to seeing them all again once we are through this.

With thanks to the many of you that have shown our school your unrelenting support both personally to me and publicly. Your positive communication at such an extraordinary time means an enormous amount to us all at Heathfield.

Yours sincerely

MS C BARLOW
Headteacher