

13th March 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

Coronavirus – COVID-19

As you will undoubtedly be aware, the government have stated that schools are to remain open although they will keep this decision under review. It is estimated that the impact of the virus will reach its peak in approximately 10-14 weeks' time so it is quite possible that any decisions made by the government now (not just regarding schools) may change during this time period.

I am writing now to assure you that all staff are working tirelessly to ensure that your son/daughter continue to receive the very best education possible. As such, apart from an increased emphasis on promoting good personal hygiene, it remains "business as usual" at Oriel High School including extracurricular activities.

I, along with other colleague Headteachers across the country, am receiving daily updates from Public Health England and continue to follow their advice as I have done since the beginning of the outbreak. As and when this advice changes I will adapt our protocols in school and inform you of any specific changes/requirements as necessary.

As I am sure you understand it is hard to predict what the impact on schools might be in the coming weeks but we have taken steps to plan, as best as we can, for future events and would appreciate your support and understanding.

Action we are taking now:

Awareness with Students

During mentor time this week we have shared information outlining the principles for good personal hygiene, focusing on steps we can all take to prevent the spread of infection. Students are encouraged to wash their hands frequently. We will also be further informing students via assemblies next week.

Soap dispensers in the toilets are kept topped up throughout the day.

General Cleaning

Our cleaning team are working at full capacity ensuring that high standards of cleanliness are upheld at all times.

School Trips

As present, all our planned trips and visits are going ahead. The school will monitor the situation with regard to the Coronavirus closely, we are in regular contact with Public Health England to ensure we have the most up-to-date advice and information. Our insurance is linked to the advice of the Foreign Office. Please remember that short-notice changes to itineraries may occur due to circumstances beyond the school's control.

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Contingency Planning

As the path of the Coronavirus outbreak develops, we will be following advice from the Department for Education and the government. This might, at some point, involve temporarily closing the school on a full/partial basis. If this happens, please note:

Parents will be kept updated via Parentmail and messages on the school website and social media channels. I would ask that if you are not routinely receiving Parentmail communication from the school at present that you share your most up to date email address and contact details with Sarah Bennett sbennett@oriel.w-sussex.sch.uk

Regarding the issue of “school closures” there are currently three main reasons why the school may close, those being:

1. Government decide to close schools, either regionally or nationally.
2. Upon confirmation that a member of the school community has contracted the virus. Should this occur, I would work closely with Public Health England and follow their advice which may be to close the school so that a “deep clean” could be conducted. Should this be necessary we would close for as short a time as possible, however I would estimate this at around 5 days.
3. A reduction in teaching staffing levels due to illness/emergence of virus like symptoms (i.e. continuous dry cough/temperature above 37.8°) may force me to consider a partial closure/full closure of the school.

Examinations

The Government and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ), the body which runs public exams are monitoring the situation with the Coronavirus. As any impact on exams will affect the whole country, we will follow any official guidance and keep parents updated.

Staff Absence

It is possible that the school may need to operate as normal but with a higher number of staff absent than usual. In order to protect the chances of our exam year groups in the face of staff absence we will consider:

- Amalgamating classes to make best use of our available teachers
- Setting private study work to be undertaken in large group settings
- Sending some classes/year groups home in order to maintain safe staff to student ratios on site. Clearly this would be a last resort as our intention is to educate all students as normally as possible.

Please be aware that staff will have to follow advice from Public Health England about attending work if they have been in contact with cases of Coronavirus and may not be able to attend work for a short period even though they want to do so.

Despite our determination to “Keep Calm & Carry On” for as long as possible, it is essential that we adopt a pragmatic approach. If we are required to close, work will be set for students using “Show My Homework”. If you haven’t yet done so please download the Show My Homework app to allow you to track the work your son/daughter has been set. Staff will be able to be contacted via email. Should this scenario become necessary, more information will be made available at that time.

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What is likely is that the national picture will change over time and although I cannot predict the future, please be assured that we are doing everything we can to mitigate against the possibilities I have identified. I am in regular contact with other Crawley secondary school Headteachers who are all facing the same challenges and although we will make decisions regarding our own individual schools, there is a strong supportive network which is essential in these uncertain times.

The Government and the NHS have made lots of advice about Coronavirus (also called COVID-19) available on their websites. I recommend that you look to those sources of information for updates and news about the virus and avoid listening to rumour and second-hand information from other sources.

Clearly this is a developing situation and, at the time of writing, the risk to health and the smooth running of the school is deemed to be low.

We appreciate your support during this period. There is a great deal of media speculation and students can understandably become anxious, particularly if they see some of the most sensational coverage on social media. We all have a responsibility to ensure debate around this topic is measured and considered.

School will continue to operate as normal for the foreseeable future.

As I have previously mentioned, I will continue to follow the advice of Public Health England and will inform you as necessary as the situation develops.

As always, thank you for your continuous support.

Yours sincerely



Phillip Stack
Headteacher