



Northern Ambition Academies Trust

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Date: 20 March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

As you know we are all facing extraordinary challenges at this time and the situation is placing pressure on all parts of society. Our staff have been doing all they can to keep our schools open or partially open since this crisis began and I would like to pay tribute to their remarkable commitment. They have been extraordinary and we will continue to play our part over the coming weeks.

As you may be aware, the government made several very important decisions on the 18th March about schools. There will be further details to follow but I wanted to ensure you had as much information as possible as early as possible.

The Government has advised schools in England to close, except for certain groups of children, from Friday 20th March onwards as a further measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. No date has been set for when schools will reopen to pupils. However from Monday 23rd March we will continue to provide childcare to the children of key workers who have no means of keeping their child/children at home and those deemed to be vulnerable. For children in these groups we have also been asked to try to remain open through the Easter holidays, and will do our best to achieve this.

Further Government advice and guidance to parents/carers was given yesterday evening, outlining the following key principles:

1. If it is at all possible for children to be at home, then they should be.
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. **You have notified us if you fall into this category.**
3. Parents should not rely for childcare upon 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.
5. Residential special schools, boarding schools and special settings continue to care for children wherever possible.

In line with our Trust values, we continue to approach this situation with bravery and resilience. It is essential that we all pull together to support our emergency services and key workers, and we will do our part, but I hope you will also recognise the difficult times schools and their staff now face. We are being called on to provide emergency childcare when for many of our staff their first thought will be to remain at home with their own families and children: so we too will need your support. You can help us by minimising your call on our limited resources, so children who do not fall into the groups listed above remain at home with appropriate care. I must stress schools are closed for public health reasons and this childcare is an emergency measure only. Please support our staff and each other by respecting the need for key workers and the most vulnerable children to have access to appropriate childcare at this time and not send your child to school.

The Government is due to offer guidance around tests and examinations at some point today. For children and young people who have worked so hard to prepare for these, this is an upsetting time and we sympathise with them. At the same time, we understand the decision the Government has made and we are assured that children's grades will be awarded on the basis of moderate assessment, in conjunction with the exam boards and Ofqual. This means that the hard work students and staff have done will be rewarded. It may not feel quite the same, and nor is it, but they will receive grades that will progress them to the next stage of their lives.

Clearly this is a rapidly changing picture – if circumstances change we will of course let you know. Please ensure you keep a close eye on the schools' websites and social media for updates during this period of closure and we will do our very best to keep you informed.

I would again like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and understanding in helping us to manage this unprecedented situation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'E Fairhurst', written in a cursive style.

E Fairhurst
Chief Executive
Northern Ambition Academies Trust

Guidance from the British Psychological Society

Advice and guidance for parents and carers from The British Psychological Society who have provided a resource paper on the coronavirus and school closures.

- Schools have not 'shut down' – Although most children will not be able to physically attend school you will still be able to communicate with senior leaders or, in some instances, teachers.
- Don't try to replicate a full school timetable – It won't be possible to replicate a full school timetable for a variety of reasons. Giving yourself and your children permission to accept this can be a big weight lifted.
- Expect stress – This is an uncertain and unpredictable situation, stress and anxiety are normal.
- Reassure children – Children can sometimes believe they are responsible for things that are clearly beyond their control. Reassure children that it is the adult's job to make sure things are OK and to keep them safe.
- Help children stay connected to their friends – Friendships are a key resiliency factor for children and young people. Most children see their friends nearly every day of the week and so not being in contact with them for some time might be upsetting. Is it possible for children to talk to their friends on the phone? Perhaps establish a group Skype or WhatsApp call? Perhaps they could write letters to each other.
- Normalise the experience – Normalising the experience is likely to reduce anxiety for many children. Reassure children that lots of adults and other children are in the same situation.
- Have a routine and structure – Having a plan and a predictable routine for the day can be very reassuring. As adults we like to know what is going to happen, and children like this too. A consistent routine lets everyone be secure about the plans for the day. It is often useful to involve children in creating this routine, so that they feel part of the plan, rather than the plan being imposed on them. You could display the routine using a timeline, or maybe pictures and visuals. Encourage children to develop independence by referring to their own routine/plan themselves.
- Don't worry if the routine isn't perfect – Remember, this isn't a normal situation. If you find that planning and sticking to the routine is causing more stress, friction or conflict, then it's OK to be more 'free-flow'. Perhaps be guided by the activities that children want to do.
- Avoid putting too much pressure on academic work – Most parents and carers aren't teachers and so it's OK not to be doing 'school-work' for six hours a day. It might be more important to be spending time together, building relationships, enjoying shared activities and reassuring children, as opposed to replicating the school timetable.
- Try to keep work in one place – If children are doing schoolwork or project work at home, try to keep it all in one place so that it doesn't spread out over the house. This can help to maintain a work/home boundary. We know that people live in different circumstances that might mean this isn't always possible, so perhaps there might be other ways to 'signal' the end of working e.g. putting away the work and then enjoying a favourite song or shared dance!
- Reduce access to rolling news – It is important to keep up to date with new developments and announcements, but it can be hard to switch off from the constant stream of news from media outlets and social media. Reduce the time spent hearing, reading or watching news –at the moment it might be overwhelming for adults and children. Try to protect children from distressing media coverage.
- Supervise children with screens – It is likely that children and young people will be using screens more often over the coming weeks e.g. phones, tablets, gaming consoles and the internet. If this is the case, make sure they are supervised. Ensure appropriate content filters are active – the UK Safer Internet Centre offers guidance on setting up parental control. Try to ensure all children have a balanced range of activities each day. Involve children and young people in these discussions so that they feel part of the plan.
- Provide reassurance about exams being cancelled – Young people may now be concerned about the announcement that exams later this year will not be going ahead as planned. They may feel like all their hard work has been for nothing. Reassure young people that the Prime Minister has

said that all children and young people will get the qualification they worked towards but acknowledge that the plan is a bit uncertain right now. Reassure young people that the government and Department for Education are working on a plan.

- Play – Play is fundamental to children’s wellbeing and development – children of all ages! It is also a great way to reduce stress in adults.