



ADVANTAGE
SCHOOLS

www.advantageschools.co.uk

30th March 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers,

I am writing with the latest news around our operations in the light of the international emergency that we currently face. In particular in this letter, we have included a wealth of information from Director of Education, Sallie Stanton, with contributions from each of our Principals.

THANK YOU

I would like to begin with a heartfelt thank you on behalf of your children for all you have done over the last week to support them. We know many of you are juggling working from home with reassuring your children, supporting them in understanding and completing the work schools have set, and finding a reassuring structure to your days as we enter into this new normality.

I am sure many of you are finding that keeping some sort of routine is helpful, whilst also understanding that you need to be flexible if things go awry or competing priorities mean things don't get completed within a strict time scale. Please be reassured that many of your children's teachers are also setting work from home whilst trying to home-educate their own children, so we do understand the challenges you are facing!

Thank you also for bearing with us whilst we adapt to the situation. We too are learning, but please be reassured we are thinking carefully about how best to continue your children's education remotely now, as well as how we may adapt our curriculum coverage in the long term to ensure nobody misses out on the education they are entitled to receive.

EMERGENCY CHILDCARE

It is essential that we continue to open only for those children of parents **who are critical to the Covid-19 response, where there is no other alternative and as an absolute last resort** for those workers with no alternative. We must keep numbers as low as possible in order to keep everyone as safe as we can. We understand that this can be frustrating, but we are grateful to you for understanding the situation. We are very grateful that every parent has adapted their working schedule or amended childcare arrangements to absolutely minimise the pressure on schools and our colleagues. We find it difficult to turn families away, but that is our job in trying to help the country deal with this emergency.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS

If your child is entitled to free school meals by application, you should have received a code from Huggg UK, our partners, covering last week and this week. This is explicitly only for families of those pupils entitled to free school meals by application.

We will not be providing these vouchers over the Easter holidays, but this will resume after Easter. If you have any queries about this, please contact meals@advantageschools.co.uk

T: 01234 332277 E: info@advantageschools.co.uk Advantage Schools, 12-16 Cauldwell Street, Bedford, MK42 9AD

ASPIRATION • RESPECT • HONESTY

OUR EXPECTATIONS OF PUPILS

There are a number of reasons we think pupils should be working at home. We thought it would be helpful to outline our expectations regarding your children's engagement with work and the reasons for them:

Keeping our memory active

Primarily, we know that everyone forgets things! We see evidence of this each year when children return to work after the summer holiday, so an extended break like this will result in pupils forgetting their learning if they stop altogether. By doing some learning each day they will be ready to pick up with their teachers again on their return to school. This is especially important for our pupils in Year 6 and Year 11: they will soon be moving on to the next exciting stage in their education, and we want to do all we can to ensure they are ready for the new challenges they will face next year!

Stay home and stay safe

We also feel strongly that pupils should be staying safe at home, and we hope that by providing work it helps you keep them occupied during this time. We know they will want some social interaction, which we would encourage. Some of our older children have been using technology to set up study groups and complete work collaboratively online, whilst others have been in contact with their teachers, asking for support and getting feedback on what we have done. This social contact is useful and school work can provide a focus for it.

Staying motivated and mentally healthy

We do not have certainty as to how long the current situation will last. Being motivated to get up in the morning and having a variety of tasks to complete throughout the day will help us all keep going through this period. For this reason, we have asked class and subject teachers to ensure work is available according to the timetable suggested for your child. The timetable is intended to be supportive – it should give some structure to the day, and should help your child feel as if there is a difference between the daytimes and evenings, weekdays and weekends. This should help the time pass in the lockdown period. Pupils should do their best but shouldn't panic if they can not stick to the timetable perfectly. They should be able to access the work and complete it later if necessary.

Educational support where it is needed

Given these reasons, we hope you understand why we view it as important we monitor work that pupils complete. At Bedford Free School we can do this by seeing who has logged on to Show My Homework and seeing what work they have submitted, and at Elstow School we can do this through ClassDoJo. We are not doing this to cause stress or penalise pupils; we know some pupils will struggle, and our aim is to be as supportive as possible. Monitoring in this way will enable us to get in touch with the pupils who most need help. We also hope it will help you to keep them motivated! At Bedford Free School, please ensure your child knows to log in to Show My Homework (so we can see they have done so) and submit work requested by their teacher. At Elstow School, you will see on ClassDoJo each day there is a task flagged that will be marked – please prioritise completing and submitting this task.

Emotional support where it is needed

There may be other reasons pupils do not submit work to us. They may be struggling emotionally with the lockdown or have a family member who is unwell that they find themselves caring for. They may be unwell themselves. Usually, we would expect to see your child in school every day, and if they didn't come in we would know something may be wrong. Similarly, over the coming weeks, if a child stops accessing the work it will alert us that something may be wrong. This may prompt us to get in touch and check whether they and the family are okay.

STAY IN TOUCH

Please do stay in touch with us to let us know how you are getting on. Our team of school leaders and teachers are already sharing ideas and experimenting with different ways of working remotely with pupils, and we want to hear the voices of you and your child to help us get this right moving forward. Please be honest and patient with us if you feel we get something wrong.

Your children are all different, and some will struggle to get through all the work whilst others whizz through it. If your child is struggling to complete everything, let their teacher know and we can advise you what to prioritise. If your child is completing the work very quickly and needs more to do, there are plenty of retrieval practice exercises they can do, such as writing quizzes for themselves using their notes and then testing themselves, creating mind maps, and combining pictures and words to create revision notes. For more ideas on how to study effectively at home see <https://www.learningscientists.org/downloadable-materials>

If your child is thirsty for more learning, get them reading! If you don't have enough books at home, you can access books online:

Oxford Owl have created a free library of decodable books for primary age children:

<https://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/for-home/find-a-book/library-page/>

Audible have currently made all their children's books free to listen to:

<https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

Free e-books for children are available here:

<http://www.childrenslibrary.org/icdl/SimpleSearchCategory?ilang=English>

https://www.gutenberg.org/wiki/Category:Children%27s_Bookshelf

There are some free e-books suitable for children and teens on Good Reads (be aware that this site is not exclusively for children, so supervising your child's selection is advised):

<https://www.goodreads.com/>

Classic literature can be read online here:

<https://freeclassicebooks.com/>

EASTER HOLIDAYS

During the Easter holidays, we may have the option of limited childcare available. This may be Monday to Friday, including the bank holidays. We would obviously prefer to give our staff a break at this time so as before this should be an absolute last resort, and we reserve the right to refuse. Please email keyworder@advantageschools.co.uk and we will reply by Friday if we have space available. As before, this is only for the children of those workers who are critical to the country's response to COVID-19, in cases where there is absolutely no alternative and as a last resort.

During the Easter holidays, while some colleagues may issue some homework, we will be suspending our timetable of schoolwork in order to give all pupils and staff a break.

OTHER SUPPORT

Whilst work is being set remotely, online, as we have said, our staff will continue to look out for all members of our community's welfare, and as you would expect, we want to support children and families when concerns arise.

We recognise that pupils will be spending additional time to normal online. We want to remind you that it is essential that we all consider the safety of the children working online. Our colleagues abide by the same principles as set out in our staff code of conduct with special emphasis placed on the acceptable use of technologies, staff pupil/student relationships and communication including the use of social media. The staff code of conduct applies equally to any existing and new online and distance learning arrangements.

We also ensure any use of online learning tools and systems is in line with privacy and data protection and GDPR requirements.

I am therefore reminding us all to remember, and to reinforce to the children the importance of them being safe online. It is especially important for our parents and carers to be aware of what your children are being asked to do online, including the sites they will be asked to access and it should always be clear who from the school their child is going to be interacting with online.

Staff from your child's school will be mindful of the fact that parents and carers may choose to supplement our school's online offer with support from online companies and in some cases individual tutors. If you choose to do this, please can we emphasise the importance of securing online support from a reputable organisation/individual who can provide evidence that they are safe and can be trusted to have access to children. We are happy to support with this if you are unsure.

There are a number of places of support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online, including:

- [Internet matters](#) - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- [London Grid for Learning](#) - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- [Net-aware](#) - for support for parents and carers from the NSPCC
- [Parent info](#) - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- [Thinkuknow](#) - for advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) - advice for parents and carers

Providing online advice for mental health and wellbeing

During this time, it is important that children working online have very clear reporting routes in place so they can raise any concerns whilst online. As well as reporting routes back to each school we also believe children should be aware of age-appropriate practical support from the likes of:

- [Childline](#) - for support
- [UK Safer Internet Centre](#) - to report and remove harmful online content
- [CEOP](#) - for advice on making a report about online abuse

Please can we signpost children and you all to follow Public Health England's most recent [advice](#) to support **mental health** during the COVID-19 outbreak. This includes the updated Public Health England [Every Mind Matters](#) platform with specific advice on maintaining good mental wellbeing during the outbreak.

Finally, if you are a family who are self-isolating and are struggling to receive food and medication – or if you know of other isolated members of our community who are also struggling – then again, please let us know.

Please keep an eye on the Advantage Schools twitter (@advschools) where we share other insights, reminders, and the occasional story. Your child's school has its own facebook page which contains other essential updates.

Stay safe,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart Lock', with a horizontal line underneath.

Stuart Lock
CEO,
Advantage Schools