



ADVANTAGE
SCHOOLS

www.advantageschools.co.uk

16th April 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you and your loved ones are safe.

I further hope that you have managed to have something of an Easter “break” and that, despite the circumstances, people feel rested and well.

As we move into the summer term in unprecedented times, it is strange to be writing a letter to you that doesn’t begin with “welcome back”, and my overwhelming feelings are not of excitement at the coming of a term where many of our young people show us the amount that they have learned.

Nonetheless, the marking of the new term is important to us. I hope that all pupils feel re-energised, ready to do everything that they can, with the support of families, to keep up with the work that is being set and to maintain their progress. We know that in these times it is very difficult, and we continue to be on-hand to support you in whatever way is possible. Our first priority is that everyone is safe, and that we are playing our part in defeating the virus. Beyond that, we want to ensure that pupils are completing the work set and that our schools remain prepared for a return, whenever that may be.

Schools are closed

On the topic of possible reopening, there has been some speculation in the press over the last week about schools being set to reopen. I think this is unhelpful. All schools in England are closed, and social distancing looks like it must remain in place for a significant time. This causes us all difficulties, but it is right that our schools prioritise safety.

We will therefore continue to follow the advice of the government. We know that they are responding to the advice of scientists and medical professionals, and hence it might change, but for the foreseeable future we should assume that schools will continue to be closed.

School work

Teachers and support staff in both schools continue to set work for pupils to complete at home. You can access these on Show My Homework and/ or Purple Mash and Class Dojo. Please do inform us about difficulties logging on or difficulties with the work. I know

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that teachers have been keen to track pupils' engagement with the tasks set. As you would expect from Advantage Schools, we have high expectations of pupils' work, and are expecting them to spend their "schooltime" working hard.

Year 11 and Year 6

The above includes Year 11 and Year 6.

It is absolutely vital that despite SATs definitely not taking place, our Year 6 pupils at Elstow School continue their studies in preparation for secondary school. Our work is set so that pupils are prepared fully for secondary school, and we will be liaising with secondary schools so that they know what has been completed.

It is also vital that Year 11 pupils at BFS are well-prepared for their college and sixth form courses, and teachers are supplying work that supports this.

I also know that year 11 will be concerned about the awarding of GCSE grades this summer. To be clear, OFQUAL have outlined that the following will happen.

Teachers will give the exam boards a 'centre-assessed grade' – this is the grade we think you would have got this summer. It is not the same as your mock exam grade but takes all the evidence about what we know about your work in every subject. It is based on classwork, homework, assessments, and coursework. We have been asked not to get you to do any more coursework. Teachers also have to rank you, so to say 'who is most likely to get a grade 7 and who is less likely'. As you would expect, teachers will be completely honest about this.

To be clear, **we are not allowed to share this information with parents or pupils.** Please do not ask.

The examination boards will take this information and award a grade. To do this, they will look at the previous performance of each pupil and the school. So they will look at how well pupils did in previous years and how well they did in their SATs. This means that the examination boards may change the grade we give them.

Pupils will then receive their grades in the summer. We do not yet know what date that will be.

These results can then be used in exactly the same way as results that pupils have in other years. You can use them for sixth form or university admission.

If you are unhappy with your results, you will be able to appeal. We don't know what this will look like, but it will include being able to sit examinations for real in the autumn. We do not know about dates for that yet.

I know this is a difficult time, and no solution would have been perfect, but I do think this is the best solution that the examination boards and OFQUAL could have come up with.

Free School Meals

Families of pupils who are entitled to Free School Meals by application are being given vouchers to contribute to the cost of food bills. At Advantage Schools, we set up a system that allowed these to go to your phone. Since then, the government have brought in and funded another provider, and so this company are distributing vouchers by email. It is

therefore essential that if your child is entitled to Free School Meals by application that we have an up-to-date email address.

There have been some delays with these vouchers. We are sorry about this, and assure you that the delays are as a result of the company administering the system. Colleagues at Elstow School and Bedford Free School have worked every day to chase these. If there are further problems, please ensure we are aware on meals@advantageschools.co.uk

Children of workers critical to the fight against Covid-19

We have extremely limited childcare available for children of workers who are critical in the fight against the coronavirus. This means that we will only offer a place if there is absolutely no alternative and it is a last resort. We ask that you limit the hours that your child is in school, and that you tolerate that we will repeatedly ask if there is any alternative. My colleagues are putting themselves at risk by offering this childcare and we must absolutely minimise this.

In the case of this childcare, pupils will have to abide by social distancing at school, keeping 2m apart. They will complete the work that was set for them anyway, and staff will try to also keep their distance.

We require all pupils **including those entitled to free school** meals to bring a packed lunch. We have now closed the kitchens in both of our schools to minimise the number of people who need to come into school and stop the spread of the virus.

To be clear: there are no longer facilities for us to provide meals at either school during this period.

To access this childcare, please email keyworker@advantageschools.co.uk detailing your name, your child's name, class and school, your occupation and the name and address of your employer. Please also include the exact days and times that you require.

Please do not assume that your child can attend until you receive confirmation. We are currently planning for the week beginning Monday 20th April and need emails to be with us by 4pm on Friday 17th April.

To be clear, even if your child was one of the very small number that accessed childcare before or during Easter, please email again.

Morning Registration Online

A reminder that From Monday 20th April we would like pupils to complete a simple online registration process before 9:30am each week day. Registering online in this way helps pupils to maintain a productive morning routine, but it will also give them a valuable way of communicating with the school. When registering, pupils will be able to raise any concerns, let the school know if they or anyone in their family is unwell and request for someone at school to contact them. In short, it will help us to look after them more effectively. The instructions for this are as follows.

Pupils should:

1. Log in to Show My Homework in the morning as usual

2. Click the link that will be provided each day. This will take them to a webpage where full instructions for completing the register will be provided as a daily reminder.
3. Before pupils complete the registration process they must ensure that they are logged into their school Google account using their school email address that takes the form:

[userid@student.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk](mailto:user@student.bedfordfreeschool.co.uk)

(Pupils will already be aware of the user ID they will need to use. It is the same username and password they use to login to computers in school and will have used in computing lessons. If pupils are unsure or do not know their school login details then please contact Mrs Logan during normal school hours on 01234 332290 or 07594 249851 for further assistance)

4. Click the 'Register Now' button
5. Complete the form and submit the register

Difficult circumstances

It is clear that the country is going into an extended period of difficult circumstances. I know that some families may be experiencing difficulty who may not have anticipated doing so. You are a part of our community, and if there is anything we can do to help, please let us know.

I continue to be in touch with our Principals on a daily basis. I have been inspired by how parents and carers, school staff and pupils have pulled together throughout this crisis. It is of course essential that we all continue to do our part, and that means to stay at home, observe social distancing, so that our NHS is not overwhelmed and we can save lives.

Stay safe.

Very best wishes,

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

Stuart Lock
CEO,
Advantage Schools