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5th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

It feels like the 23rd March was an extremely long time ago – so much has happened. We have all made significant adaptations to our everyday lives especially in finding ways to keep in touch whilst at the same time keeping ourselves and others safe.

In our school community we have had some parents, students and members of their family who have been diagnosed with COVID-19. None of these cases have had an effect on students or staff who have been at school during lockdown. There have been some cases when members of staff and students have self-isolated because of symptoms – in all these cases Public Health guidance of self-isolation have been followed.

Our thoughts are with all of you who are grieving because somebody close to you has lost their life due to COVID-19. Our sincere condolences to you and your family at this exceptionally difficult time.

Recently we have heard and read lots of speculation about schools' reopening after the May half term. At the same time concerns have been raised about how to maintain the safety of students, staff and the wider community when it is evident that a transition 'back to normality' is likely to take a long time. How restrictions will be lifted in the educational sector is still under serious consideration by the government who has reassured the nation that these decisions will be led by scientific and medical advice.

Within the Sunflower Federation we have started to prepare for our next stage:

MEADOW WOOD - We have decided to open Meadow Wood School on 11th May as we think that it is essential to get it back into operational order before the May half term. This will enable us to be better prepared for any changes in government guidance. We need to reorganise our leadership, admin, teaching staff and operational processes to operate again on two sites.

We have offered placements at Meadow Wood for a VERY small number of specifically identified students for two weeks before half term, - mainly on a part time basis. All these new students at school will be in the priority category of either: - Key workers OR Vulnerable children (for example child protection, safeguarding or identified by social services)

Parents whose child will be able to attend Meadow Wood School before the May half term have already been contacted.

PARENTS' VIEW – In order for us to plan our federation organisation for the second half of the summer term **we need your help**. We need to identify those students whose parents would like their child to attend school when we are able to increase the number of students attending school. This increase will be in line with HCC and government guidance at the time.

Therefore we will need to know:-

1. Have you received a shielding letter (medically vulnerable) for your child and for what period of time? Are you thinking about sending your child to school after his/her shielding period has come to an end?
2. Have you made the decision to keep your child at home / self-isolate till the end of the academic year?
3. Would you like to send your child to school as soon as we are able to extend our provision?

Please send an email to the school office by 15th May sharing your thoughts for your child's schooling with us.

admin@breakspeare.herts.sch.uk or admin@meadowwood.herts.sch.uk

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGES for us to plan the second half of the summer term come from;

Limited staffing: We have a relatively high number of staff who are in the category of medically vulnerable – it is likely that many of them are unable to return to work for the rest of the academic year. On the top of that, our staffing numbers are compromised because of non-COVID related illness and the need to self-isolate because of COVID-19. This latter one may be easier to manage because of increasing testing opportunities – time will tell.

Social distancing: It is likely that social distancing guidance will be in place for a long time. This aspect of health and safety is very difficult to manage in our schools due to our students' need for supervision and support and our high staffing ratio. The only realistic option to maximise social distancing is that the students are cared for and taught in very small groups of 2-3 – this means we need space.

Unknown guidance: We are preparing for something for which we haven't yet received full information. It may be that HCC or the government will inform us of something that may significantly impact on our plans. We are particularly interested in the health and safety guidance for the education sector.

Building a new unit at Breakspeare School. We have been informed that this project will start during May half term. This means we need to move the students who are currently using C5 and C9 spaces into the main building and consequently we will be even more restricted with our space considering social distancing guidance. (It is very likely that this building work will compromise Breakspeare's provision for the first half of the autumn term as well. I will share further information about the autumn term arrangements by the end of June.) The fact is however that any inconvenience that this building work will cause is offset by improved facilities for the students.

For the reasons explained above, it is not likely that we can have many more students on the Breakspeare site during the second half of the summer term; therefore if the need arises we would plan to move some Breakspeare students temporarily to Meadow Wood School. We may also need to consider delivering our provision for some of our students on a part time basis either morning / afternoon or 2-4 days per week.

Please note that when the government lifts restrictions on education and schools are able to extend their provision this doesn't mean that the risk of transmission of COVID-19 at schools is completely eliminated. Preventative measures to manage COVID-19 risks are likely to be needed for a long time and - we continue to do everything we can to keep the students and the staff as safe as we can.

Please support us to enable us to move further in our planning for the second half of the summer term by sharing your thoughts with us as soon as possible and before 15th May. Thank you!

If you wish to discuss your situation with us please don't hesitate to contact myself or Darren using Breakspeare Schools' number 01923 263645

I cannot thank you enough for being so accommodating, understanding and supportive during this exceptionally difficult time. It is true that difficult times bring communities together!

We are looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Keep safe with very best wishes,
Merja

Useful links:

SOCIAL DISTANCING: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

GUIDANCE TO EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures>

PUBLIC HEALTH GUIDANCE: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus>