

Learning for Life!



Headteacher: **Ms Annemari Ottridge** M.Ed. NPQH NPQEL

19th March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I am writing to you, as promised, to update you on the most recent information and guidance we have received from the Government and Secretary of State for Education. I am pretty confident in saying that any leader, no matter what their level or scale of responsibility, will be digging deep to find genuine consistency, transparency and honesty in their leadership right now. The degree of trust we have to place in experts from all fields shows how vulnerable we are as individuals are when facing decision-making about our personal and family lives during these uncertain times.

The Government and Secretary of State have informed us that all schools are closing from Friday, **but schools will remain open to vulnerable children and any key workers' children who are needed in the frontline.**

This afternoon we were advised by the Director of Education Services at Hertfordshire County Council that they "... will include all staff who currently work in Herts schools as key workers, providing ongoing education for their children." In addition we have received confirmation that planned transport routes and arrangements will continue as usual into next week.

I would like to explain what this will mean to our students and our school.

Lonsdale School is a Local Authority Special School and we will take our guidance from Hertfordshire County Council together with the Government. We want to do the very best to support our students, families and staff **safely, fairly and equally.**

This means that we are going to keep our school open until it becomes unreasonable and unsafe to stay open due to reduced staffing levels, sickness or serious risk to the school community.

Remote learning from home via school website

As per my previous correspondence to you, we know and acknowledge how school communities have been affected by unprecedented student and staff absence since the outbreak of Coronavirus. Previously introduced guidelines for extending self-isolation from 7 to 14 days has already had an impact on Lonsdale School. The message we are getting from some of the Department of Education officials is that they are aware that Special Schools like Lonsdale may have no choice but to close if our staffing levels are too low, or if our learners are categorised as particularly vulnerable to infections.

This statement supports my correspondence to you that *'all children have the right to access learning and education, yet remain protected from the increased risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19) due to their chronic neurological conditions (CP), chronic (long-term) respiratory diseases (asthma), and learning disabilities. With this in mind, I want to reassure you as parents, that should you choose to keep your child at home, you can make that decision and be confident that their learning can continue remotely until such time as your child is ready to return to school.'* (AMO letter, 17.03.2020)

Today we have 48 students working from home. Their absence is authorised as they are still learning with support from school staff available throughout the school day. Our students and their families have engaged in learning in their 'virtual classrooms' and we have received positive feedback. Thank you to all students and parents for your great emails.

Lonsdale School, Brittain Way, Stevenage, Hertfordshire, SG2 8UT

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This will now become a daily way of working for all of us. I understand that we all need to think slightly differently and perhaps adjust our ways of doing things – this includes learning. This is the time to deploy those valuable independent learning skills we have practised at school together. We, as Lonsdale teachers, will be here to guide, support and help your child to learn and have fun. We will put out video messages – YouTube, here we come! Lonsdale Learning Centre will be the click of a button away. More about this tomorrow

Attending school and coming to school every day until further notice

Lonsdale School remains open for students to come into school and to learn. Those students and parents who choose this option will have the full support from our teaching and support teams, as well as our catering and facilities management teams. At this moment of time, I am unable to confirm if any NHS therapists will be on school site to support children with their programmes.

Some members of the School Nursing team are required to work in acute children's care at the Lister Hospital. This means that we will have significantly reduced medical/clinical support cover during school hours. To mitigate this situation, managers at East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust and our senior staff have jointly agreed to close the REP from Monday, 23rd March onwards; all residential staff will be deployed in classes during school opening hours.

School communication

The school emails are the most reliable way of getting in touch with your teams. We are committed to respond to your emails as soon as possible, and our admin team will triage generic emails within 24 hours. If you need to contact us urgently, please use the school phone line. May I remind you that we are working with reduced staff numbers and telephones are manned by senior staff who are also supporting learning in classes.

We will continue to provide weekly newsletters and all important information will be available on our school website. Please see the website for telephone number, contact information and updates.

Finally

I believe that we at Lonsdale School have genuine compassion and a determination to get things right for our students, families and staff. We have prepared the school to move our daily learning online and we are in the process of distributing digital devices, learning tools and equipment for students who may not have access to these resources. Nobody will be left behind.

Whatever decision you as a family make about your child's education at this uncertain moment of time, we are here to support you. I will update you on daily basis via our school website and the list of contact details will be added to the student area section from tomorrow morning.

Please look after yourselves, and your families and friends.

Warmest regards

Annemari Ottridge
Headteacher

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