

18th March 2020

To: All employees of Reach South Academy Trust
Subject: COVID-19 2019-nCoV, Coronavirus

Dear Colleagues,

The Coronavirus epidemic continues to affect more of us in the UK each day. The Government is issuing and updating its advice on a daily basis. Within the Trust we are assessing that advice each day and updating our own procedures and communications to keep everyone informed and safe. The Government's policy remains to keep schools open and we will do that as long as it is safe to do so for our pupils and staff.

I have been overwhelmed over the last few days by the sheer professionalism and sense of public duty displayed by so many of you. Staff have come forward to volunteer proactively to work in schools, should we have to close them, to ensure that vulnerable children can still receive free school meals. Staff have asked how they can continue to support vulnerable children to safeguard them. Many of you have worked to ensure that we have learning packs, YouTube stations and endless creative solutions to continue to provide children with an education if they are forced to learn from home. I cannot thank you all enough for your professionalism and duty of care for your pupils.

Today, our first school has had to close. Springfields announced the closure of its residential provision yesterday and has to announce the closure of its school today. I am aware that many of you that work at Springfields are upset that the school has had to close. The unique needs of many of the children at Springfields means that we cannot respond to staff absence in the same way that we can at a mainstream school. School closure of course creates logistical complications for the school staff now that we have to support and educate children that are dispersed to their own homes. We may also have to do this while dispersed to our own homes. I am assured that all of our school leaders are working together to identify how we can do this most effectively.

In order to keep schools open we are seeking to reduce the numbers of people coming into the schools so that we can reduce the risk for school staff and pupils. Yesterday, we took the decision that office based staff that can work from home will be asked to do so. This means that if the person's job is able to be done off-site and that they have access to any necessary equipment and systems to allow them to do their job from home, then we will ask them to do so. Where staff are identified and asked to work from home, I am afraid that this is not negotiable. We have to reduce the risk to our staff and pupils in schools, which have to be there.

A number of staff are advised to work from home because they may be particularly vulnerable if they catch the virus. The Government include in this group: pregnant women; people aged 70 or over; people with a relevant underlying health issue. Age is an arbitrary risk attribute. What if you are 69? To remove the arbitrary consideration of people being aged 70 and over or approaching 70, the Trust is advising any employee that is 65 or over, to work from home. If you have a relevant underlying health issue, please advise the HR department. They will ask for

some evidence of an existing health issue which can be provided later. We can then fully support you working from home. Guidance was issued yesterday to give more information about the implications of working from home.

Some of us will have symptoms of Covid-19 infection and some of us will actually become infected. Some of us will have family members in the same household that develop symptoms. The advice is clear that you must stay at home under these conditions and we sent out specific guidance on this yesterday.

With increasing numbers of colleagues prevented from working in school or unable to come to work, then that presents a challenge for the rest of us. We cannot expect it to be business as usual. We will need to adapt our practices and how we group children. We will need to be flexible about our approach and more than ever we will need to pull together in teams and support each other. This may require us to have to carry out different tasks in support of each other. We also need to keep ourselves and our pupils safe by taking sensible precautions. Yesterday we cancelled school assemblies. Parents collecting children will be asked not to enter the school building. We need to teach children safe hygiene and the importance of not touching each other. We need to organise our classrooms so that children can sit with a gap between them and the next child. Most importantly we must reassure and not scare children. There is of course real anxiety amongst us all. It is so important that we do not pass that anxiety on to the children. Remember, children themselves appear not to get severe symptoms when they contract the virus. Most adults will have mild symptoms similar to flu. Let us make sure that in our language and actions we reassure children and do not scare them.

To make sure that everyone has access to the latest guidance we are making sure that all of our academy web-sites carry the latest information as well as the main Reach South web-site.

This may be the biggest challenge of all of our careers but I wouldn't want to face this challenge with any other team. The Reach South team, that is all of our teachers, teaching assistants, site staff, cleaners, caterers, administrators, managers and governors; I am so proud of the professionalism and public duty that you are displaying every day. I know you will continue to do this until this crisis is over.

With very best wishes,



Dean Ashton
CEO Reach South Academy Trust