



Penistone Grammar School

Never Stop Flying

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Achieving Excellence through a Values Driven Education

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Dear Parent and Carer

I write to provide you with several pieces of really important information and as a result would like to pass on my apologies in advance for the length of this letter to you. However, I know a few parents have expressed their preference for information to be shared in one single correspondence wherever possible.

Contained within my letter you will find the following information:

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Coronavirus: Covid-19 Latest Update

On 12 March 2020 the Prime Minister announced the Government's latest advice in relation to the coronavirus outbreak, which has now been declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-coronavirus-12-march-2020>). We have revised our position following this statement and I have captured the main implications of this for you below.

The current advice indicates that closing schools now will do more harm than good at this time. The directive is that schools should only close if they have specifically been advised to do so and as a result, Penistone Grammar School remains open for all students.

The guidance in terms of self-isolation has changed. The advice now specifies that people should stay at home (self-isolate) for 7 days if they have coronavirus symptoms, specifically a high temperature (classified as 37.8C or above) or a new, continuous cough (<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/>). With immediate effect we therefore ask that parents do not send students to school should they be presenting with



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these symptoms. Please ensure you report the absence through the normal channels by calling the attendance team on 01226 762114 (please select Option 1) stating clearly the reason for the absence.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement, the Department for Education and Public Health England have updated their travel advice for schools ([COVID 19: travel guidance for the education sector](#)). Within this guidance the government "advises against all overseas education trips for children under 18". We have several foreign excursions planned over the coming months and will be liaising with the relevant tour operators in terms of next steps. As soon as we have the appropriate information, we will write to those affected. We would ask that parents please bear with us in the interim and we will be in touch at the earliest opportunity.

In terms of the domestic trips planned, the guidance states: "The Department for Education is not currently advising against domestic trips (residential and non-residential) for children under 18 organised by education settings. However, education settings should refresh their risk assessments to take account of the latest health advice and ensure measures are in place and agreed with parents in case children or adult supervisors believe they have been exposed to COVID-19 and exhibit symptoms that require self-isolation". We will be undertaking this work over the coming days and will once complete, will reach a decision about whether each visit will go ahead as planned, or whether it needs to be delayed or cancelled. Again, we will communicate with those affected as soon as this work is complete. We will aim to have contacted everyone by no later than the end of next week.

We are reviewing advice from recognised authorities, including Public Health England, Department for Education, Barnsley Public Health, the NHS and Barnsley Local Authority daily and will continue to update you as and when new information becomes available. The advice remains that the best thing we can all do to protect ourselves against the spread of coronavirus is to wash our hands for 20 seconds or more with soap and water. To this end I would be grateful for your support in encouraging your children to wash their hands more frequently when at school, particularly upon arrival in the building and prior to break and lunchtime. To support students with this in school we have taken a number of steps: Staff are reminding students to wash their hands on the way to the dining room when leaving lessons; there are posters in each toilet outlining the correct technique for effecting hand washing; we have increased the number of toilets available for students at break and lunchtime, opening additional facilities in the blue and, when needed, purple wings; we have changed our cleaning regime to include increased checks of the toilets for replenishment of hand soap and toilet rolls, and to check cleanliness.

We have been contacted by parents and carers with various questions and requests for advice in relation to coronavirus. To assist all members of our learning community we are currently in the process of putting together a 'Frequently Asked Questions' document which will be shared on our website. Once available, we would be grateful if you could refer to the FAQs before telephoning school. As I am sure you can appreciate, we are currently experiencing a significant increase in the volume of calls received and apologise to those of you who have been unable to get through when attempting to contact school over recent days. As always, I thank you in advance for your support with this; we will email the link to the document once it is available.

Completion of Building Extension Work: Partial School Closure Day for Students in Years 7, 8 and 9

In better news, I am pleased to confirm that our new extension is almost complete! We embarked upon an ambitious external building project to accommodate our increasing population almost one year ago. When our students return after the Easter holidays, they will finally be able to benefit from a fantastic new teaching block which includes 6 new classrooms and 2 fantastic new science labs.



To accommodate the move into the new building we have agreement from the Local Authority to invoke a partial school closure day, to take place on **Thursday 2 April 2020**. On this day school will be closed for students in years 7, 8 and 9 only. We will remain open for students in years 10, 11, 12 and 13, with normal lessons taking place.

The partial school closure day is essential in enabling us to ensure we can move into the new building and be ready for teaching from the first day after the Easter holidays. I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support with this, not least as we are aware that this additional school closure will undoubtedly cause disruption for families. Should any parent or carer of year 7, 8 or 9 students be unable to make alternative childcare arrangements on this day we are happy to make provision for students in school.

Finally, I would like to thank our students and staff for their patience, understanding and tolerance of the disruption while the building works have been taking place.

Parent Voice: Launch of our 2020 Parent Survey

We believe the relationship between home and school plays a key role in providing a truly excellent educational experience for our young people. We value your feedback and to that end, would be grateful if you could take a few minutes to complete our Parent Survey for 2020.

We launched our first Parent Survey in 2012 and each year the results play a vital role in shaping our school improvement priorities. Last year we saw the largest number of responses, with over 620 parents completing the survey. This year we would like to see even more parents submitting a return, enabling us to ensure the results are representative of as many families as possible.

All responses to the survey are entirely anonymous and can be submitted in the following ways:

- **Electronically** via the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/PGSParentSurvey2020>.
- **Paper version** which can be collected from our main reception or posted home to you (please call 01226 762114 or email enquiries@penistone-gs.uk). Please return all completed surveys in a sealed envelope marked 'Confidential Parent Survey 2020'.
- **In person** by making an appointment with a member of our Reception Team (via the contact details given above).

The deadline for completion of the survey is **Friday 10 April 2020**. I'd like to thank you in advance for your support. I will share the results with you in May, at which point I will also be inviting you to attend Parent Focus Groups with members of the Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body to discuss in more detail any of the key areas identified within the survey.

Mental Health Award: Gold Status!

As I took up post in November 2017, I made a commitment that as a school we would put pastoral care and the mental health and wellbeing of our students at the heart of everything we do. In a climate where budget cuts are bringing about unprecedented cutbacks in terms of external agency support, and at a time when the mental health issues our students face are increasing, with the support of our Foundation Governors we have invested in developing our provision. This has enabled us to ensure we can impact positively on our young people and play our part in influencing the national agenda around mental health and wellbeing support for young people.

We have embedded mental health and wellbeing support into every aspect of school life:

- Understanding mental health and wellbeing and how students can keep themselves well is a key feature of learning, with focussed work for year 7 students in Resilience lessons, and across all year groups in Religious and Citizenship Studies, assemblies and collective learning.
- We are becoming a 'Thrive' school, which allows us to assess and then support our young people around their social, emotional and mental wellbeing.



- We are part of a prestigious trial, working with the Anna Freud Foundation, supporting their research into what methods work within schools in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of children.
- We have trained 25 staff as 'Staff Wellbeing Ambassadors' to help those staff and students who may need support for their mental health.
- We have also trained 25 students who are working as 'Student Wellbeing Ambassadors', promoting positive mental health and working to break down the stigma that can be attached to mental health with their peers.
- We have increased our targeted support, rapidly expanding the number of external agencies we work with to support our young people. We now work with 21 external agencies, from those who support with eating disorders, to bereavement counsellors and many, many more.
- We have recognised that traditional 'talking therapies' don't work for everyone and have also invested in alternative therapies, including employing an Art Therapist for one day per week.
- For those with more complex needs, we work closely with MindSpace who come into school for both one-to-one intervention and group therapy work. To supplement this, a member of the Inclusion Team will shortly complete training to become an accredited Counsellor, with all members of the team undergoing intensive training to support those students experiencing suicidal ideation.

On a local level, Mr Gillett (Assistant Principal for Inclusion) is Chair of the Early Intervention Panel, a panel which ensures young people across the borough receive appropriate support and intervention at the earliest possible opportunity.

On a National scale, we were pleased to be invited by the Department for Education to be part of the Expert Research Group which looked at the implementation of School Mental Health Support Teams as part of the Government's green paper.

As a result, I am absolutely delighted to confirm that, following verification, Penistone Grammar School has been awarded the Carnegie Centre of Excellence for Mental Health in Schools 'School Mental Health Award', Gold Status. This is a fantastic achievement and amazing recognition of the hard work and dedication of every member of our learning community to ensure we are doing everything we can to support our children.

Although many staff have contributed in securing this award, I would particularly like to thank Mr Gillett for his passion, co-ordination and commitment in driving this forward. This is an important step in our journey to excellence in the field of mental health and wellbeing support, and one of which we are incredibly proud.

A New Library for Penistone Grammar School!

Whilst we were pleased to be able to increase our student intake, enabling us to welcome more students than ever before into our learning community, this development also brought about one of the hardest decisions I have been forced to make during my time as Principal; temporarily removing the library to make way for additional teaching space.

I am pleased to finally be able to confirm however, that with the completion of the extension we are now able to reinstate our library, news which I know will be welcomed by students, staff and parents in equal measure.

Led by Mrs Demetriou (our Leader for Reading and Academic Vocabulary), we are working towards an anticipated official opening date of 1 June 2020 with lots of exciting plans already well underway. You can see the progress towards opening, together with other library-related developments by following Mrs Demetriou's blog which is accessible via the following link: <https://pgslibrary.wordpress.com/>.

We are determined to make our new library a central feature of our school and want to involve our community at every possible opportunity. We will shortly be inviting applications for student library ambassadors and are working with a local artist who has generously donated their time to develop a bespoke one-of-a-kind mural, of which our students will decide the final design. We are also asking for the support of our wider community and have identified several ways in which people can support us to get our library up and running, making it a place where our students can truly flourish. Please follow the link to find out more: <https://donatemyschool.com/PGS2099>.



Arrangements for the Final Week of Term

Just to end, given the changes to the calendar I think it would be useful to clarify the arrangements for the final week of term:

- There will be normal timetabled lessons taking place on Monday 30 and Tuesday 31 March.
- Following the postponement of our Rewards Trip to Alton Towers, students will now also be in timetabled lessons on 1 April (please refer to my letter sent Wednesday of this week and dated 11 March 2020).
- School will be closed on Thursday 2 April to students in years 7, 8 and 9 to facilitate the move into the new extension, with normal timetabled lessons for years 10, 11, 12 and 13.
- As planned, school is closed to all students on Friday 3 April for the Inset Day.

We look forward to welcoming students back to school on Monday 20 April 2020.

We will continue to keep you updating regarding the evolving landscape in relation to the coronavirus over the coming weeks. As always, should you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us via the email to enquiries@penistone-gs.uk.

Yours sincerely



Paul Crook
Principal

