

Dear Headteacher

### School opening over Easter holidays

I thought it would be helpful to outline the position of Waltham Forest Council around schools remaining open during the Easter holidays. As the Department for Education has said *“Those who work in and with our schools rightly take their place next to our NHS staff and other critical workers as central to our efforts in battling this virus”*.

The Department for Education have further made it very clear that:

*“Schools, and all childcare providers, are [.....] being asked to continue to provide care for a limited number of children - children who are vulnerable, and children whose parents are critical to the COVID-19 response and cannot be safely cared for at home.*

*While **as many schools as possible should try to stay open for eligible pupils**, this will not be possible for all settings and the local authority should **coordinate pooling of resources** so pupils are able to access provision elsewhere”*.

I have highlighted some of the Departmental text in bold as this has informed decision making in Waltham Forest. Our approach is to:

- encourage all schools to remain open where possible and where there is a need to care for the very specific groups of pupils identified
- promote Hubs or clusters of schools and encourage school to school collaborations

What we have not done is seek to adopt a one size fits all model or impose a solution on you.

Many schools have entered into collaborations for example with schools “collapsing” with others. Many more schools are actively planning this in preparation for the Easter holiday period whilst supporting staff to have regular time off using rotas. This is the sort of pragmatic approach we would encourage and seek to facilitate.

Informing our measured approach has been key Government guidance in the battle against COVID-19. Requirements around **social distancing** have informed our recommendations for pragmatic and manageable collaboration between schools as opposed to other possible solutions that would bring larger numbers of young people together in one setting. In addition, our locality-based Hub model is designed to ensure that residents can adhere to the expectation that we all **avoid all but essential travel**.

In terms of the Easter holiday period the Departmental expectation is that *“Where possible, we would encourage childcare providers, schools and colleges to continue to look after critical workers’ children and vulnerable children throughout the Easter holidays”*.

Departmental guidance further states:

*“We understand that this is a very difficult time for teachers and all school staff, and we are asking a lot of them to help the country fight this virus. We know that school leaders, and local authorities, will make sensible decisions on staffing and what breaks will be needed. But **we are asking schools, wherever possible, to maintain provision for children of workers critical to the COVID-19 response and vulnerable children over the Easter holidays**”*.

Schools may wish to consider adopting rota systems where appropriate to ensure that staff get appropriate breaks whilst managing provision through this challenging period.

Departmental guidance has previously indicated that schools should remain open over Good Friday and Easter Monday and we are seeking formal confirmation of this. I note however that the National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) are now advising members:

*“Bank holidays are akin to weekends and, as such, there is no expectation that schools will be open on these days.*

*It is important to emphasise the government’s overall approach to the Easter holiday period, which is that schools should make their best endeavours to remain open where they can”.*

The Waltham Forest view is that schools that are open through the Easter holidays should open over Good Friday and Easter Monday. We do however understand there may be schools that determine this is not appropriate e.g. some church schools and that there will be other schools where there are no children that need looking after.

For ease of reference the most recent guidance issued yesterday can be found [here](#).

School are reminded that they should inform the Council immediately where they have decided to close either temporarily or for a longer period. When informing the Council, schools will need to indicate what Hub arrangements they have entered and what measures they continue to have in place to support the most vulnerable.

Finally, I attach an updated safeguarding policy, which has been updated in light of [DfE guidance](#) and the Hub model we are supporting schools to move to.

The DfE have recognised the *“School leaders around the country [who] are taking the lead in supporting families through this difficult time”*. I also thank you for your vital contribution to the local community at this time.

Regards

David Kilgallon

Director of Learning and Systems Leadership

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