Coronavirus Update – March 13th 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

I am writing to you to provide further guidance on the current position regarding COVID-19 coronavirus and the school’s response. We have received advice from the local authority, National UK Government, Welsh Government and Public Health Wales, and are following this official advice closely. At present, the advice remains predominantly focused on ‘business as usual’, and this will be communicated to you today in a letter from Mr Lindsay Harvey, Director of Education.

In response to this guidance, the school has prepared a Coronavirus Prevention Strategy 12th March 2020 (delay phase). This strategy has been informed by current advice. Given the fast-moving nature of the present situation, this strategy may be changed at any time in light of any new medical advice, legislative or local requirement.

We have provided some responses to frequently asked questions, and hope you find this information of use. Please see below for this information.

International Educational Visits

On March 12th 2020, the UK government published new guidance on international trips. Foreign Office guidance - Overseas trips for children under 18 (Poland and Austria)

“The government advises against all overseas education trips for children under 18. This is because trip leaders would face significant challenges in making arrangements to ensure children’s welfare, should adult supervisors or children be required to self-isolate”

The clear advice is not to operate any such trips at present or in the near future. As this advice is so new, we do not know how cancellation will affect matters such as refunds or insurance. The school will keep all affected parties updated as matters progress and hope to be able to confirm the position regarding refunds in due course, although we are unable to offer any guarantees. We understand that this is a disappointing outcome but we have taken this decision in the best interests of our pupils and to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all involved. We are planning to meet with parents regarding school trips next week, and hope to have further information to share.

I fully understand that this is a concerning time for everyone, and we will do our best to maintain regular communication as this is such a rapidly changing situation. Many of the decisions made over the coming days will likely be at a national level and, therefore, all we can do at Bryntirion is prepare.

Your ongoing support is very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely

RK Pawar (Headteacher)
Coronavirus and schools frequently asked questions (FAQ) - March 12th 2020

The local authority has provided schools with some responses to frequently asked questions. These are outlined in this letter, together with some specific information from the school (in green).

Q1. Some children have recently returned from a country where a worker at the resort pupils and staff were staying at has been diagnosed with coronavirus. What extra precautions should we take and should the pupils be asked to self-isolate?

A1. Public Health Wales has advised that there is no need for any special precautions in relation to this matter unless the country specified was a Category 1 or Category 2 area. In this scenario, refer to FCO advice summarised in the answer to Q1 above. Schools should otherwise continue to follow the current general advice in relation to regular handwashing and monitoring of symptoms.

Q2. A family member is travelling from a Category 2 area to stay in the same house as a pupil from our school. What do we need to do?

A2. As of 11 March 2020, advice received is that the individual travelling from a Category 2 country/area should self-isolate if symptoms develop, and follow guidance in relation to calling NHS Direct on 111. There is no need for the pupil to be kept home from school.

Q3. What does each school do in formulating contingency plans in the run up to or event of schools being closed?

Q3. Schools should review their own plans to ensure they are up to date.

We are currently preparing a ‘Business Continuity Plan’. This includes what to do in the event of full or partial school closure. We are concentrating on the provision of remote working for staff, and preparing online resources and work for all learners. In addition, we are prioritising such provision for examination classes to enable learners to work and prepare for examinations as effectively as possible at home.

Q4. Should we continue to arrange and prepare for school trips, locally, nationally and internationally?

Q4. The local authority is advising that all school trips, events, award ceremonies, gatherings and parent evenings should cease with immediate effect.

On March 12th 2020, the UK government published new guidance on international trips. The clear advice is not to operate any such trips at present or in the near future. As this advice is so new, we do not know at present how the cancellation will affect matters such as refunds or insurance. We are seeking further information and clarification on these matters.

Foreign Office guidance – March 12th 2020

Overseas trips for children under 18 organised by education settings

The government advises against all overseas education trips for children under 18. This is because trip leaders would face significant challenges in making arrangements to ensure children’s welfare, should adult supervisors or children be required to self-isolate.
Q5. **What happens if a pupil with an underlying medical condition (eg Cystic fibrosis) receives advice that they should stay home because of the risks of coronavirus?**

A5. Parents/carers will need to follow any medical advice that they receive from medical practitioners, particularly where their child may have an underlying medical condition and be in a higher risk category.

Q6. **Should schools limit the numbers of visitors to the school to essential visits only?**

A6. No large-scale meetings/gatherings should take place and schools are advised to only hold essential meetings.

   In following this advice, the school has cancelled all such events for the rest of the term. Unfortunately, this includes the following:

   - Positively Mad visit (for Year 11) – March 19th
   - Musical Showcase – March 25th
   - Transition visits
   - Maths lessons for parents
   - Year 11 parent meetings

   We do consider meetings with parents to be essential visits and will continue to hold these in school. However, we would respectfully ask parents to come into school only when it is strictly necessary.

   All visitors signing into school will be required to use hand sanitiser provided or to wash hands.

Q7. **Should schools stop using swimming pools?**

A7. At present (12 March), there is no specific advice regarding the use of swimming pools. The local authority would encourage schools to visit the Public Health Wales website for updates.

   The pool is open to pupils, and swimming lessons will continue as usual.

Q8. **If parents decide to keep their children (without symptoms) off school, how do we record?**

A8. All pupils should attend school if they are able to do so.

   At present (12 March), children who are not displaying symptoms, have not been in contact with anyone from a designated country or have not been in close contact with anyone who has displayed symptoms (or has been in a designated country), should attend school.

   Pupils who do not attend school need to be coded as ‘unauthorised absent’. However, we are currently working with Welsh Government with a view to amending this process in light of issues relating to coronavirus. We will schools if this advice changes.

Q9. **Are parents of children with complex medical needs able to keep their children home from school?**

A9. Yes. The local authority would support any decision made by parents to keep children with complex medical conditions at home.