



## Haberdashers' Monmouth Schools

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From the Principal **Mr James Murphy-O'Connor** MA Oxon

5th June 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians

I hope that you remain safe and well. Thank you for your ongoing support and we continue to express our gratitude to those of you who remain on the frontline of response. I write to you this week as we look ahead to the much-anticipated easing of lockdown and how this will impact on the re-opening of schools and our provision for key workers' children.

### **Welsh Parliament announcement on re-opening of schools**

The Executive Committee has met to discuss the possibility and implications of a return to school on 29th June as suggested by the Welsh Parliament on Wednesday.

We have decided **not to re-open our schools** (with one key exception, please see below) for the five days that the Senedd's decision would have affected us. This decision was not taken lightly and was only reached after lengthy debate, carefully weighing up the views of those parents and staff who have written in with their thoughts. We are aware that not everyone will agree with the decision, but I believe that a clear message delivered in good time is best for future planning.

The one exception is that we are thinking of opening one school site to accommodate a restricted service even though this is fraught with logistical issues in terms of preparing the site to reopen, picking up/dropping off and parking. In particular, we hope to find a way to allow **'Exam Year Groups'** (i.e. current Years 10 and 12) some interaction with teachers. However, this is challenging because of the restrictions placed on pupil numbers in school by the Senedd and so we will write to explain more as our planning becomes clearer.

I am happy to outline the compelling reasons which shaped our overall decision:

As a group of 'independent schools' we believe that we must act truly independently and decide what we believe to be best for our schools. In particular, we remain watchful of the COVID-19 situation in the areas that our families live in. We believe that it is best to remain cautious during the last week of term and do not feel we can implement the social distancing measures required across all our sites for just five days;

We think that offering a service of any sort could well be unintentionally divisive as many of our students will not be able to attend. School buses will not be running for day students and our boarders will struggle to return;

Evidence from fellow schools in England has confirmed there has been a relatively low uptake by parents and we do not believe that the experience would be as positive as we would have hoped for. Were we to open, we would focus on social activities for those students who could make it in and this presents staffing issues where the focus remains on 'Habsmonmouth online' which will continue right up until the end of term on 3rd July;

We are planning to support those students who are going through a transition point by 'face-to-face' online meetings with key staff and classmates and will be in touch with them over the coming weeks. We are also looking at how we can reconnect the remainder of our pupil body to ensure they feel more confident ahead of returning to school in September;

We have furloughed nearly 300 support staff to enable us to reduce our outgoings as much as possible as we charged only 60% of our day tuition fees during the Summer term. From the 10th June, under a new government directive, we no longer have the flexibility to unfurlough staff on a temporary basis. To reopen our site for five days would have a profound impact on our financial model put in place to cope with the pandemic;

The final element in our decision-making process was that we remain hopeful of fully opening in September and we are carefully planning for this.

### **Key Workers Provision**

I would like to help clarify this situation as some parents have questioned the current arrangements.

When we headed into lockdown back in March, we agreed that families who had at least one key worker serving in a frontline position but whose circumstances warranted support could book their children onto our key worker scheme. This was done in good faith and we continue to honour this arrangement.

Since half term, we have been juggling providing this much-needed support with delivering our online educational programme. We have had to adapt this service so that new-joiners from 1st June must have both parents on the frontline and for whom there is absolutely no safe alternative. We can only staff the provision based on those children booked in and, therefore, please let us know if you do not need a session and please avoid just turning up without booking as our staff-to-pupil ratio may not be sufficient.

Staff in our schools have worked with little break since the imposed lockdown and the Easter holiday period was largely taken up with preparing for a new way of delivering and planning lessons. It is imperative that, whilst there will be some activity over the Summer holiday period – such as results days and the potential of a quarantine provision for our overseas boarders in late August - the staff have a break in readiness for the new school year. We will, therefore, **be closing on 3rd July including our key worker service.**

I hope that this helps to clarify these key messages. Of course, please do contact me should you have any further thoughts, reflections or questions.

Kind regards,

