

**Children and Families Directorate**

Chris Baird (Director)

Your Ref:

Our Ref:

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18<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following on from our letter dated 13<sup>th</sup> March and in response to further national guidance and advice from the Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England (PHE) regarding COVID-19 Coronavirus, we would like to reassure you that the health, safety and wellbeing of students is of the utmost importance. We are taking every proactive measure to minimise risk to everyone in our school communities.

As previously, no specific advice has been provided special schools attended by young people with possible reduced immunity and/or complex health conditions. As the coronavirus situation develops, the extreme vulnerability of our children, many of whom have complex health and care needs, is becoming increasingly evident.

A further risk factor for these children is that many are transported to and from school for 30-60 minutes each way on local authority minibus transport or taxis, which exposes them to daily additional risk of exposure to Coronavirus.

High numbers of staff exist in our special schools to maintain safe levels of educational supervision and care. High levels of staff absence will mean that we will reach a point where we are not able to operate safely and we are risk assessing the situation each day. The latest guidance on Social Distancing means that it has been necessary to instruct a number of staff members in the high risk category to remain at home from 18<sup>th</sup> March, as a protective factor. With this in mind, school staff numbers will be significantly depleted for the coming days and weeks.

To address these risks to our school communities, the Headteachers of Blackmarston, Barrs Court and Westfield have agreed a common approach, ensuring that each Herefordshire special school for young people with learning difficulties follows the same protocol throughout the period. In discussions with the Local Authority, the difficult decision has been made to close the schools for an extended period of time. This is a precautionary move to ensure that the families can make the safest arrangements to protect themselves from exposure to the coronavirus, and to avoid hospital admissions.



For the reasons already described in this letter, **Blackmarston, Barrs Court and Westfield Special Schools will be closed from Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020 until further notice.** The schools, in discussion with the Local Authority, will be reviewing the situation on a regular basis. Up-to-date information will be posted on each school's website and we suggest that you check this on a regular basis. Please note that this only applies to the three special schools mentioned in this letter. All other schools will be reviewing the national advice in the light of their own pupils and informing parents of the situation regularly as the advice changes.

This letter is being sent to parents and carers at all three schools, and we hope the information and advice provided supports you to be as proactive as possible under these very unusual and difficult circumstances.

Individual schools will be organising their own strategies to support the continued education of all pupils who attend the special schools in Herefordshire and for continuing effective communication links between the schools and parents and carers.

If you require further information about the Coronavirus, please contact the Department for Education Coronavirus helpline 0800 046 8687 (8am to 6pm Monday to Friday), or email [DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk](mailto:DfE.coronavirushelpline@education.gov.uk)

For the latest guidance please visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/coronavirus-covid-19-uk-government-response>

If you wish to clarify anything within this letter, please contact your child's school directly.

**Contact details:**

Blackmarston School – [admin@blackmarston.hereford.sch.uk](mailto:admin@blackmarston.hereford.sch.uk) / Twitter @Blackmarstonsc1

Barrs Court - [admin@barrscourt.hereford.sch.uk](mailto:admin@barrscourt.hereford.sch.uk)

Westfield School - [admin@westfield.hereford.sch.uk](mailto:admin@westfield.hereford.sch.uk) or via the website [www.westfield.hereford.sch.uk](http://www.westfield.hereford.sch.uk)

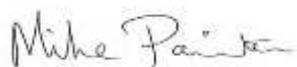
Yours faithfully



Head Teacher  
Barrs Court College and School



Head Teacher  
Westfield School



Head Teacher  
Blackmarston School

