



# George Stephenson High School

3 April 2020

Dear parent/carer

I hope this finds you well and that you are staying as safe as you can be at this time. I wanted to write to give you an update on our school. Apologies for the length of this email and all the attachments but I thought I would send everything we wanted to share with you in one go – please take some time over the coming days to read it and discuss what we have shared here with your children.

The last three weeks have been possibly the most difficult time in all of our working lives and our personal lives too. As teachers and as parents we have found ourselves on the front line helping our young people navigate their way through a situation we can barely make sense of ourselves. There will be some positives that come out of this situation but at the moment it still feels unsettling, unnerving and we are all understandably anxious. As adults we need to stay as strong as we can for ourselves and our own families as well as the young people we are supporting both in school and in their own homes.

As we approach what would have been our traditional Easter break it is important that the children do get a break from school work. There is no expectation on children to do home learning during the two week holiday period, though if they would like to do some to maintain their routine then of course that is fine. We will all need some time to switch off and physically and mentally recuperate. Our teachers have been proactive in putting a lot of the children's work online and have made it as accessible as possible but it is important to keep a balance between how much time is spent in front of the screen or books, how much is spent keeping active and how much is spent relaxing and focusing on positive mental health.

I wanted to let you know that school will remain open for the children of critical workers and any vulnerable children who cannot be safely cared for at home throughout the Easter break from Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April until Friday 17<sup>th</sup> April. This is including Bank Holidays but not weekends. There will still be no provision for school meals so children must bring a packed lunch with them. Please contact the school office urgently on 0191 2161115 or by [mainoffice@gshs.org.uk](mailto:mainoffice@gshs.org.uk) if you intend to use this facility over this time.

I do need to remind you that this facility is offered as a last resort and it is safer for your children, yourselves and the staff of the school that your children remain in the safety of their own home. However if you are a critical worker and your circumstances change over the coming weeks and you do need to send your child into school, we will be open.

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## Home Learning

We hope you are managing to get into some kind of routine and finding the home learning resources useful. Some key reminders are here:

- The link to the folders for student work can now be accessed from the front page of the school website <https://www.gshs.org.uk/students/school-closure-home-learning>
- Additional work is being added and students should check their school email regularly for updates. If there are any questions about email passwords please contact [itsupport@gshs.org.uk](mailto:itsupport@gshs.org.uk)
- Should a student run out of work they can contact their teacher directly but they must use their school email account.
- Do not worry if your child struggles with any work - this is normal! Please make a note of any areas they get stuck on and they can bring this into school to share with their teachers on their return.
- We will continue to develop the range and style of home learning provision after Easter, including how best to provide feedback to students on some of their work and providing on-going advice about students' well-being while having to study at home.
- We will continue to develop 'bridging' work in all Sixth Form subjects, for current year 11s who intend to return to Sixth Form, so that they can continue with their learning in readiness for post-16 study in the future.
- After Easter, we will communicate further with year 11/year 13 students about how GCSE/A levels will be awarded. OFQUAL have just today released information about this and we will write to you again in the near future to explain this further. In the meantime, I attach a letter for students and parents that OFQUAL have put on their website today (Friday 3 April).  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/877830/Letter\\_to\\_students\\_-\\_Summer\\_2020\\_grading.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/877830/Letter_to_students_-_Summer_2020_grading.pdf)

## Online Learning:

In addition to the resources provided by teaching staff at GSHS, which are on our school website, there are a growing number of fantastic online resources currently being developed which parents and students may choose to access. As a school we have a comprehensive Online Safety Policy which can be found on our school website. In here, you will find a reminder of the STUDENT E-SAFETY AND ICT ACCEPTABLE USE POLICY (STUDENTS) which you might find useful to discuss with your child as a way of refreshing their understanding of how to keep themselves safe online. Two further more points to note here during the COVID-19 situation, are that students must only use their GSHS Office 365 outlook email accounts if they need to contact their teachers not any other sort of personal account. Furthermore, students should respect the online privacy of all teaching and support staff and not seek to make contact with them on any form of social media. For the time being, we have advised all staff against using any form of live video conferencing with

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students via such platforms as Zoom. However, if our approach to this changes, we will update all staff and students on any necessary safeguarding protocols.

To support you in safeguarding your child during any online learning, it is essential that you are aware of the very clear reporting routes in place so you can raise any concerns whilst online. You are now temporarily able to report any online safety incidents through our normal guidance system and through contacting [safeguarding@gshs.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@gshs.org.uk) and any emails can be directed to the most suitable member of staff. Additionally however, we would also like to signpost children to age appropriate practical support from the likes of:

- Childline - for support
- UK Safer Internet Centre - to report and remove harmful online content
- CEOP - for advice on making a report about online abuse

Parents and carers may choose to supplement the school or college online offer with support from online companies. We would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of securing online support from a reputable organisation/individual who can provide evidence that they are safe and can be trusted to have access to children. Support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online includes:

- Internet matters - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- London Grid for Learning - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- Net-aware - for support for parents and careers from the NSPCC
- Parent info - for support for parents and carers to keep their children safe online
- Thinkuknow - for advice from the National Crime Agency to stay safe online
- UK Safer Internet Centre - advice for parents and carers

## **Safeguarding Update**

We will shortly be publishing a COVID-19 annex to our GSHS Child Protection policy which will appear on the Safeguarding page of our school website which has been developed in partnership with North Tyneside Local Authority in response to new government guidelines which can be found here <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers/coronavirus-covid-19-safeguarding-in-schools-colleges-and-other-providers>

In addition to this policy, we would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of the main points of concern for parents to be aware in terms of safeguarding during this period of partial school closure.

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As a school, we will continue to operate our Safeguarding procedures. Any concerns raised by students, staff or parents/carers will be dealt with as per the child protection policy and, where appropriate, referrals to Children's Services will be made. During this time, our school Guidance Team have been asked to make remote or phone contact or door-step visits to conduct welfare checks on some of our young people.

If as a parent/carer, you have safeguarding concerns about a young person during this partial school closure period, you can contact our temporary safeguarding email address on [safeguarding@gshs.org.uk](mailto:safeguarding@gshs.org.uk) which will be checked daily. You can also speak to a social worker by calling the Front Door Service in North Tyneside on 0345 2000 109. They are open 8.30am – 5pm, Monday – Thursday and 8.30am – 4.30pm on Friday. Outside of those hours you can call the After Hours Service on 200 6800. You can also email Children's Services at [childrenandadultscontactcentre@northtyneside.gov.uk](mailto:childrenandadultscontactcentre@northtyneside.gov.uk). **If you have an immediate concern and feel that a child is at risk of significant harm or danger you must contact the police first on 999.**

It would be helpful if parents / carers could monitor how their children are balancing their time and ensure that each element is proportionate and not placing their children under too much stress. As children are spending a lot more time online, I have included a key message from Northumbria police about safeguarding are children at this time. Please take notice of this and try to monitor how your children are accessing online sites and emphasising the importance of keeping safe.

## Family Wellbeing

When schools are closed, this can be a worrying time for young people and parents for lots of reasons. We are conscious that some members of our school community might be experiencing problems at home, be worried about exams, struggling with their own mental health or lots of other issues that young people deal with daily.

For this reason, we would also like to draw your attention to the section of the North Tyneside Council website page: [nteysis.org.uk](http://nteysis.org.uk) a called 'home learning'. On here you will find a 'Wellbeing' section which will be updated every week containing some useful links. This week's are as follows:

Children's Guide to Coronavirus from the Children's Commissioner (Cross phase)  
- <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/publication/childrens-guide-to-coronavirus/>

Guidance on supporting bereaved children during the coronavirus outbreak (Cross phase)  
– <http://www.childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/help-around-a-death/covid-19.aspx>

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Family SEAL (Social and Emotional Aspects of learning) booklets – which contain lovely activities for children to do with families

(Primary) <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110810113520/http://nsonline.org.uk/node/66364>

Little Rescuers – First Aid home learning sessions for Primary schools- <http://tumblesandgrumbles.co.uk/little-rescuers-learning/>

Find your Brave – Children’s Mental Health Week resources (Cross phase) <https://www.childrensmentalhealthweek.org.uk/schools-and-youth-groups/>

Mud and Lotus Mindfulness practises – free audio recordings that could be a helpful antidote to all the uncertainty, isolation and stress, which are known ingredients to trigger negative states of mind <https://mudandlotus.co.uk/audio-practice/>

**Anna Freud – Schools in Mind** have created a new page on their website to help provide clear, simple advice to all those supporting children and young people, including the young people themselves: <https://www.annafreud.org/coronavirus/>

**British Red Cross** have published ‘Coronavirus teaching resources’: for teachers and parents of children aged 11+, <https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/coronavirus-newstink>

**Place2Be** – Guide to helping parents answer questions from their children and to support family wellbeing, can be found: [https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/?dm\\_i=43MR,SZ24,5QMZYG,3HKE4](https://www.place2be.org.uk/about-us/news-and-blogs/2020/march/coronavirus-information-for-children/?dm_i=43MR,SZ24,5QMZYG,3HKE4)

**Scouts UK** have compiled a list of activities and instructions on indoor activity for children: <https://www.scouts.org.uk/the-great-indoors/>

**MIND** – Coronavirus and Your wellbeing- general care advice and resource: [https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?dm\\_i=43MR,SZ24,5QMZYG,3HKEA,1](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/coronavirus-and-your-wellbeing/?dm_i=43MR,SZ24,5QMZYG,3HKEA,1)

We have also attached a ‘worry tree’ from the Recovery College which we all might find useful during this time and also a resource developed by PIXL which is a 30 day Kindness and Wellbeing Challenge.

The school nursing team are still available to support young people via our Chat Health texting service. Attached is an information poster about this service.

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### **Free School Meals**

We have this week provided supermarket vouchers for our Free School Meals families. These vouchers covered the period of Monday 30 March to Friday 24 April. The Government has now launched a national voucher scheme and we will contact FSM families in the week commencing 20 April with further information about this. The likelihood is that our school will take part in this new scheme but we will let you know. In the meantime, for all students attending school during this period of closure please ensure your son/daughter brings a packed lunch. The school currently does not have a school kitchen and we are in the process of installing a new kitchen over the coming weeks. For further information on FSM and school food, please contact the school on [mainoffice@gshs.org.uk](mailto:mainoffice@gshs.org.uk).

With my very best wishes to you and your family

Mr Wilkinson

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