



To all Headteachers

**Children, Young People and
Education Directorate**

Sessions House
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Ask for: Matt Dunkley
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Date: 16th November 2020

Dear Colleague

As the Covid 19 rates rise rapidly across Kent, we appreciate that it is becoming increasingly difficult for those schools in communities with high infection rates to continue to deliver a high quality of education and provide sufficient staff to cover both a remote learning offer to students having to self-isolate, and cover lessons for those who are able to continue to attend school. I know that you all recognise the importance of taking whatever action you can to remain open for students to attend school on site, both for their education and wellbeing and for the benefit of the local community. This also helps parents stay in work, especially where they work in education, health or other key sectors.

In talking to many of you, we recognise and do not underestimate the huge pressure this puts you and your senior leaders under. You will be dealing with the not inconsiderable anxieties of parents and staff whilst having to manage situations that none of us have faced before and that change on an hourly basis in many cases. I would like to thank you all for your huge efforts in the interests of your children, young people and local communities.

Whilst it remains the case that decision making on the running for your schools is for you to take with your Governing Bodies and Trusts, it is becoming clear that there are considerable differences in decision making at a locality level, and that does cause some problems at community level, and for some families. Quite simply, it is perceived that some schools are closing when other local schools facing similar or the same challenges are not. Colleague headteachers are raising the impact that this is having on the running of their own schools, particularly where, from a community standpoint, the circumstances faced appear to be similar.

I know that no one who has taken the decision to close has done this lightly and many, though not all, are discussing their rationale with the Local Authority, after speaking to Public Health England and, in some cases the Regional School Commissioner's office, whilst others are just notifying us of the decision after it has been taken. Can I ask you to ensure that you are clear on the requirements and what is meant by close contact so that

individuals and bubbles are not sent home to isolate needlessly? In many cases a number of the parents in schools where a decision has been taken to move to remote learning are teachers and teaching assistants in other local schools, or work for the N.H.S or in another health or vital community role and the knock-on effect in that community is considerable.

I am sure you will have gone through the many stages of decision making prior to taking a decision to move to full remote learning for your pupils and students – engaging supply, re-timetabling lessons and restructuring staffing, zooming lessons into classes managed by TAs and many other alternatives that you would not have believed possible in better times. I would also expect that where you know you are close to having to consider a decision to move to full remote learning, that local conversations with neighbouring schools take place. These can be facilitated by your Area Education Officer, where this would be helpful.

Thank you again for your efforts as these are hugely appreciated.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt Dunkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the letter 'y'.

Matt Dunkley CBE
Corporate Director, Children, Young People and Education