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Thursday 30th April 2020

Dear parents and carers

**RE: further update on the COVID-19 crisis from Leigh Academies Trust.**

Neil Willis, the Trust's Chief Operating Officer, wrote to you before Easter with a range of updates about how we are addressing the COVID-19 emergency. Your child's academy Principal will also have been in contact with you at regular points throughout the last few weeks.

A great deal has happened since Mr Willis' last letter in a fairly short space of time. Our staff have become quickly used to new ways of operating and are working tirelessly to support your children in a whole variety of ways. I would like to use this opportunity to pay tribute to my colleagues across Leigh Academies Trust for the superb daily efforts they are making to ensure we emerge from this crisis in the best position possible.

We thought now was a good time to provide you with some additional updates on behalf of the Trust. I hope you will find the contents of this letter useful. If you have any queries about these or other matters, please do not hesitate to contact us.

**Reopening of schools**

You may have seen the Secretary of State explain to the Education Select Committee earlier this week that schools will reopen in phases. Whilst we have no firm dates just yet, we assume this means that some year groups will return before others with priority given to those pupils facing public examinations in 2021.

The next major government review of the lockdown takes place on Thursday of next week so we expect to hear much more at that stage. If the government gives schools a three-week signal to reopen at this point from Monday 1st June, we will write to you again with further details. We are entirely mindful that parents, pupils and staff will be understandably very anxious about any proposed return to school and will do all we can to help ease concerns and uncertainties as we move into the next phase of this crisis.

Should that be the government's position, it will leave schools offering three types of provision for the time being. There will be education offered in school for designated year groups, child care provided like now for key worker children and those defined as vulnerable, plus continued online remote learning for children still at home. These arrangements could be in place for several weeks through the next stage of the pandemic. They would represent a sizable shift in how schools operate and present challenges for our workforce which we will strive hard to overcome.

You may have also heard the government's own scientific advisor confirm earlier this week at the daily Downing Street Briefing that social distancing in schools will be "extremely difficult". We will of course continue to do as much as we can on this front whatever the expectations are about schools opening again. However, we will have less control over arrangements on school buses and other forms of public transport.

## **Second online learning survey**

Nearly 4,000 of you kindly completed our first online learning survey just before the Easter break. This feedback has been invaluable to our school leaders as they put in place new ways of working that enable pupils to carry on learning from home using technology. Despite feedback from a handful of parents, though, for safeguarding reasons, we continue to have no intention to provide our own live, video-streamed lessons.

Tomorrow we will ask you to give us your views again so that we can check how we are getting on since last time in responding to your initial feedback. You will be sent a link to a short survey via electronic mail which will also be placed on your child's school website homepage. If you can complete the survey by the start of the new working week that would be very helpful indeed.

The questions are deliberately very similar to last time so that we can compare how your views have changed. The free text option is invaluable as it allows you to provide more qualitative feedback. Whilst this survey is confidential, our school leaders have requested an option for you to provide the name of your child against your feedback for them this time around so that they can follow up with you about individual issues if necessary. If you feel able to complete this optional section of the survey we would urge you to do so.

## **myON online library**

Now we are clear that online learning is here to stay in one form or another for at least the time being, the Trust has made a considerable investment in a new package called myON to support you and your children to learn from home with a focus on the vital activity of reading that underpins the whole curriculum. Parents of children at Leigh Academy Blackheath should note that your sons and daughters already have access to myON.

Many families may have difficulty accessing sufficient reading books at present, especially those firmly linked to your child's age and ability. Leigh Academies Trust has been working with Renaissance Learning to provide the myOn digital library to every pupil across our academies. This means that all pupils, regardless of their age or academy, will have a large volume of online library books at their disposal until at least August 2021, fully funded by the Trust. This new product will complement, not replace the other work already being provided by your child's teachers.

For primary academies the package includes 1,000 books and for secondary academies, 5,000 books, including classics titles and GCSE texts. All academies will receive daily news articles as well as 1000s of audio books, which can be shared with pupils during the lockdown. The programme, which is linked to the Accelerated Reader strategy already operating in most of our academies, enables teachers to monitor pupils' reading habits and to set them tasks, so that meaningful learning and monitoring of progress can take place.

You will receive further communication from your child's academy about the programme and how it works shortly. Individual academies have a nominated myON lead to support you with the process and we hope that you will find it helpful and beneficial as you endeavour to balance the range of demands that have been placed upon your household's time. Help and guidance will be available to you and your child directly from academies and on academy websites.

Yours faithfully,



**Simon Beamish**  
**Chief Executive**