



18<sup>th</sup> March 2020

## COVID-19: A message from the Director

To all head teachers and governors in Archdiocese of Southwark Schools  
By email

Dear colleague

In addition to the notes we have provided in the weekly bulletin, I wanted to take this opportunity to say a personal thank you to all our school leaders and governors, as well as staff in our schools and the pupils. You are all doing an extraordinary job in the face of the most challenging circumstances. I fully expect that the government will move to closing schools in the next few days, because of the increasing pressure you are all under as the virus continues to spread. The team here has been inundated with requests for help and advice, so we have a comprehensive understanding of the scale of the challenges you face.

You have our full support at this time, not only practically as indicated above, but through prayer, as you might expect. Please be assured that if there is no blanket closure of schools initiated by the government, you will have my full backing for any closure decision you may wish to take. I know that every one of you faces the dilemma of keeping the school open so that the most vulnerable are safe and secure, and that the disadvantaged continue to receive a free school meal, as appropriate. This set against the advice to not hold mass gatherings and for social distancing. The Archdiocese's trustees have asked to be kept up to date with all school closures. Please do let us know, if that's what you choose to do.

### Practical arrangements

In keeping with Archdiocesan policy, the Education Commission staff will be working from home from Monday. We have spent the first part of this week making sure we can continue with business as usual in normal office hours. We are fairly confident that we have stress-tested our systems so that the team can work safely and efficiently at home, without compromising security or relevant aspects of the GDPR. This means that phone contact with the team will be restricted. Please do send a request for assistance by email to the [ecenquiries@rcaos.org.uk](mailto:ecenquiries@rcaos.org.uk) address and we will ensure that the right person from the team contacts you. Please see the weekly bulletin for updates.

As you know already, the meetings that can be held online will go ahead, face-to-face gatherings have been postponed or cancelled, and we are keeping under review big Diocesan events such as 'Picnic and Praise'.

We are, of course, in the Church's most solemn and sacred period. It is wholly regrettable that pupils will not be able to benefit from participation in many of the Church's most wonderful liturgies. I am sure you have considered a whole variety of ways in which Lent can be marked and Easter celebrated without assembling children for collective acts of worship.

### Yourself

Please do all you can to keep yourself and your loved ones safe and healthy at this time. The COVID-19 pandemic has reinforced the pivotal importance to the nation of its teachers. There is a welter of information out there about staying safe, so I won't add to it here. Please do, though, ensure that you observe all the advice; it is important to minimise the amount of suffering where we can.

I will continue to keep you all in my prayers,

Dr Simon Hughes  
Director of Education