



Going the extra mile (and more)

After the Prime Minister's announcement of the second national lockdown on Saturday evening, I immediately checked for the updated guidance for schools on the Department for Education (DfE) website. After all, they've been issuing messages to schools at weekends, early hours of the morning and during bank holidays since the first lockdown.

Many of you may not be surprised that there was no update on the expectations for schools available on Saturday, nor Sunday. Surely this would be available on Monday, so that schools could plan properly and let everyone know what was happening? Again, it is unlikely to surprise you that it was yesterday afternoon before any guidance was published. In practice, for most school leaders, this meant that we found out well after the school day had ended. As the guidance is several pages long, and has links to many other lengthy documents, this meant that it was only this morning, when lockdown had already started, that we could begin to discuss how this would impact on our schools and what we need to do in response.

I am well aware that schools aren't unique in this respect, and many other organisations will be facing similar problems with lack of timely information on rapid changes in Government policy. However, it is yet another issue that school leaders are facing in keeping our schools open to all pupils. We are only able to do this because of the amazing commitment of our staff. Some of the newspaper headlines at the weekend made me very angry, as they created a narrative that we want schools to close, when precisely the opposite is true.

If you would like an indication of how hard our staff are working to keep things going, here are a few examples. This week we have not closed any of our schools or campuses, despite the fact that we have been down to almost half of the total staff on some campuses. In recent weeks, a number of our staff have also volunteered to stay back after school to clean classrooms to help us deal with staff absence in our cleaning teams. Like many other schools and organisations, although we've had thankfully relatively few actual Covid-19 cases amongst our community, the impact of the numbers of staff who are having to self-isolate or who have emergency childcare issues because of this is enormous.

Today, we had to make a decision at 10.30 am whether or not to close down all of the schools on the Josephine Butler site, as we were unable to operate the kitchen due to staff absence for self-isolation. Closing would have been the much easier option, but we are always mindful of how much learning our pupils have missed and the massive inconvenience that a sudden, unexpected closure would have caused to parents and carers.

Less than two hours later, we started to serve meals to our pupils thanks to the amazing Glenton's Bakery and staff volunteers, who in many cases gave up their own lunch break to unload, set up and serve the food. We provided sandwiches or hot bakery products, all prepared off site, to all of our pupils who use our catering facilities and including food for special dietary requirements where requested.

Catering has been incredibly difficult for all schools since full reopening. The restrictions of the 'bubble' system mean that the time required to serve pupils has been massively increased and as a consequence, we've had to reduce the usual range of choices. This is far from ideal, but given the restrictions placed on us by government guidelines and staff shortages, it is the best we can do under the circumstances. We've also had a significant increase in workload for catering staff in preparing food packages for pupils on free school meals who are self-isolating.

I am not telling you this for the purpose of sympathy or looking for extra praise for our staff, as I know that the same spirit of everyone rolling up their sleeves to help in a crisis is true in many organisations. However, I do think it is important for you to know that your children in all of our schools are cared for by a magnificent team of staff, who care deeply for your children and do everything they can to make each school the best it can possibly be. I am so grateful for the commitment of our staff in going the extra mile, and often much further.

Alan Hardie, CEO



A message on communication

Do we always get it right at NCEAT? Of course we don't; we are human beings and none of us are perfect. Do we always try our best to get it right; absolutely we do. When things go wrong, we try our very best to put it right. We welcome constructive criticism. We properly investigate concerns, admit when we've made mistakes and look to improve so that we don't make the same mistakes again.

When something goes wrong, or you want to find out about something that seems unclear, we would always recommend that you do so via the school or campuses official lines of communication. We appreciate that it can sometimes be difficult to get hold of the person you would like to speak to, particularly at busy times when they may be teaching, on duty, in a meeting, etc, but by bringing concerns to our attention directly, we are much more likely to find a solution to the problem. To support you with this, we are currently working to upgrade our communication systems. This will mean a new website, but we are also looking at systems such as voicemail, which generates an automatic email to the member of staff you are trying to contact. We will provide you with more details on specific improvements as we implement them.

However unhappy you are, the least successful way of resolving a situation is simply posting a 'rant' on social media. Often publicly posting about a situation makes it much more difficult for us to investigate impartially and resolve a situation. We've yet to experience a case like this when the information posted has been fully accurate. Anyone can be a "keyboard warrior" but this will not lead to an improvement in the situation which is why we would urge that any concerns or complaints are raised through the proper communication channels, then schools have the opportunity to keep a record of these and the outcomes.

Posting like this also tends to attract comments from others who have no involvement in the situation and who may post comments which are untrue, unkind and potentially libellous. If this is the case, we will not hesitate to contact the social media site to have the posts removed, contact Northumbria Police or even take legal action where the need arises to protect one of our pupils or a member of staff.

We appreciate the anxiety caused to parents and carers when you are worried about your child. Please be assured that we take all reports very seriously and if something happens that concerns you, if you contact us by email or phone, we will investigate and someone will respond as quickly as they can.

How to contact us:

⇒ NCEA Trust

Chief Executive Officer: Mr A Hardie
Clerk to Trustees: Ms L Dalby
☎ 01670 816111
E: ceo@ncea.org.uk
E: mat@ncea.org.uk
E: gov@ncea.org.uk

⇒ NCEA Bishop's Primary School

Principal: Mrs M Hinson
E: admin.bps@ncea.org.uk

- **Grace Darling Campus**
Central Parkway
Newbiggin by the Sea
NE64 6RT
Head of Infants Campus:
Mrs N McGrath
Head of Junior Campus: Mrs S Cole
☎ 01670 812019
- **James Knott Campus**
Norham Road, Ashington
NE63 0LF
Head of Campus: Mrs Mullen
☎ 01670 813219
- **Josephine Butler Primary Campus**
Academy Road, Ashington
NE63 9FZ
Head of Campus: Mrs Marriott
☎ 01670 815444
- **Robert Stephenson Campus (Early Years)**
Thorntree Gardens,
Ashington NE63 9TA
Director of EYFS: Mrs C Lishman
☎ 01670 812368
- **Thomas Bewick Campus**
Moorhouse Lane,
Ashington NE63 9LP
Head of Campus: Mrs J Williamson
☎ 01670 812075
- **William Leech Campus**
Lynemouth, Morpeth
NE61 5TR
Head of Campus: Mrs A Thompson
☎ 01670 860267

⇒ NCEA Castle School

Josephine Butler Campus
Academy Road, Ashington NE63 9FZ
Principal: Mrs S Wild
☎ 01670 844322
E: admin.cs@castle.ncea.org.uk

⇒ NCEA Duke's Secondary School

Josephine Butler Campus
Academy Road, Ashington NE63 9FZ
Principal: Mr R Atkinson
☎ 01670 816111
E: admin.dss@dukes.ncea.org.uk

⇒ NCEA Warkworth Primary CE School

Guilden Road, Warkworth,
Morpeth, NE65 0TJ
Headteacher: Mrs L Ritson
☎ 01665 711369

A message from Sally Milner, NCEAT Chaplain

On Wednesday I spent a wonderful 10 minutes in the playground with a reception class. The sky was blue, there wasn't a breath of wind and the sun was warm on my face. There were giggles and squeals as the children ran round, road on tricycles, jumped into tyres, collected leaves and whatever else took their fancy. A couple of the children were stacking milk crates, they knew exactly what they were making, although I was fairly baffled. They all concentrated and worked together, thoroughly enjoying what they were doing. They then took it in turns to jump from a milk crate onto a PE mat. It was all so joyous and carefree. I had forgotten that we all begin like this and that our inner child is still there, wanting to have fun, to laugh, giggle and play.

"Jesus called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

Gospel of Matthew 18: 2

Let us pray

Almighty God, you sent you son Jesus into the world as a child, born of a woman

Help us to reconnect with the child within ourselves,

To find joy and delight in life even in these difficult times,

Give us opportunities for laughter and play as we draw close to you the source of all life.

Amen

Sally Milner, Trust Chaplain

@NCEAChaplain



"Remembrance is an ideal time to bring people of all ages and backgrounds together to reflect upon the service and sacrifice of the Armed Forces, and to unite in the hope for a brighter, peaceful future."

The Royal British Legion

In light of the changes to traditional Remembrance events this year, our schools and campuses will each separately commemorate Remembrance 2020 on Wednesday 11th November, including a minute's silence.



Enabling everyone in our communities to let their light shine