



# Alameda Middle School

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24<sup>th</sup> April 2020

## COVID 19 School Closure - Summer Term Update

Dear parents and carers,

This week's update comes at a rather unusual start to the Summer term. The Government has presently extended the lockdown until 11<sup>th</sup> May. The value of the month for March was '**co-operation**' which in the present situation was very apt, April's value is '**honesty**' and if we are going to be *honest*, then it could be said that we are all enjoying the option of a lie in, trying new experiences, having time together, sorting out cupboards, garages and sheds. *Honestly* though, I am sure we are all, in our own way, missing school and working with others. School is a major part of our waking world and we are all missing lessons and the daily interaction and the joy of learning. We appreciate everyone is doing their best to deal with this change.

On Monday Gavin Williams, Secretary of State for Education, confirmed that no decision has been made on a timescale for re – opening schools. Schools remain closed until further notice, except for children of critical workers and our most vulnerable children. Moreover schools will only re – reopen when the scientific advice indicates that it is right to do so.

Following this decision Alameda will continue to welcome the small numbers of pupils into our school, providing the learning and pastoral care that you would expect. For those not in school, curriculum materials and learning materials will continue to be provided and we have worked on improving this. There are more details on this later in this week's letter.

### Booking a place at school – key workers

We continue to use the booking system via Edulink for children of key workers with no possible alternative arrangements, or for other children in categories set out by the government. Please can I remind you to make bookings by 2pm on the previous day to enable us to organise staffing. If your child is currently not on the list to attend but your circumstances as a key worker change and you need your child(ren) to attend please call us at school or email [office@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk](mailto:office@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk). Please explain why you are making this request and for the days/dates it is to be required. If it is long term, we will then contact you to set up booking via Edulink.

If the weather continues as it has been over recent days, can we remind those of you sending your child(ren) to school make sure they have a hat, sun cream and a water

bottle as we will try to be outside as much as possible. Obviously, we will use shade at times, but if they can be as prepared as possible this will help them to be safe.

## **Reports**

Earlier this week, years 5, 6 and 8 received their interim report, and year 7 their written report. As appeared in the letter sent home to parents, 'whilst these reports are being sent out now in these unprecedented times, they were written at the end of the spring term and as such, the on track section relates to your child's progress towards their target at that point in time.' All the reports were sent electronically via Edulink One. If you are experiencing any Edulink login problems, please contact [edulinkhelp@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk](mailto:edulinkhelp@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk)

## **Year 8 HPV Vaccinations**

Parents and carers of pupils in year 8 will have received a separate message about the second HPV vaccination which was due to be given in May. Due to the current situation, this has been postponed. However, the Bedfordshire 0-19 team have advised that following the first vaccination, the 2nd one can be given up to 2 years afterwards. Therefore the 2nd vaccination can be rearranged once schools have reopened.

## **Year 6 PGL**

We are presently looking into the 29th June – 3<sup>rd</sup> July PGL trip. I have contacted PGL, unfortunately, there is no person to talk to in the office, so all communication at this stage is via email. I also contacted Woodland Middle to discuss their situation, as they have a trip before ours, but they have had no official response yet. Our finance team are looking at the terms and conditions related to the trip and are liaising with our insurers, Zurich insurance company. At this moment in time, we are not asking for any payments to be made by those following the payment scheme.

## **Home Learning Activities – A new system from Monday 27<sup>th</sup> April**

We are continuing to update the activities provided on our website. From Monday, you will see an overview of the activities set for each year group for all subjects. We are aware that activities have been set in a variety of places and that this may have been difficult to follow. Where possible, we have tried to eliminate the need for home printing and to provide more video related content rather than worksheets. We are working on a better online solution – but you will appreciate that this takes time and is difficult while we are mostly working remotely, we want to make sure that any safeguarding elements of this are carefully considered. . This improved system is designed to help you and to support straight away.

The Documents titled 'Home Learning Weekly Overview' can be found here on our school website:

**Year 5** <https://www.alamedamiddleschool.org.uk/page/?title=Year+5&pid=99>

**Year 6** <https://www.alamedamiddleschool.org.uk/page/?title=Year+6&pid=100>

**Year 7** <https://www.alamedamiddleschool.org.uk/page/?title=Year+7&pid=102>

**Year 8** <https://www.alamedamiddleschool.org.uk/page/?title=Year+8&pid=103>

The overviews include links to resources as well as suggestions of activities for the week. The documents also include an updated guide to home learning for pupils and also an updated guide for parents.

We have also attached to this letter a reminder for pupils of how they can access their Edulink accounts.

Our overviews provide links to the new National Oak Academy, the government resource introduced on April 20<sup>th</sup>. We also advocate the use for BBC Bitesize, again, daily resources were launched on April 20<sup>th</sup>. We will help by signposting you to the relevant parts, but you can, of course, use these resources however you wish.

The BBC posted a useful article about home learning which we wanted to share:

**Coronavirus: How do I home-school my children and what does Bitesize offer?**

The full article is provided with this letter, as we felt that it was really useful. There are also some useful links in it.

Our overviews also provide links to activities on Edulink, Alameda TV on YouTube and social media as well as documents on our website. We are, as we said before, working to continue to improve the work provided. We ask, however, that you are mindful that while doing this, our teachers are also looking after some pupils in school and many have their own families at home.

***We also want to emphasize that we do not want you to feel under pressure to get pupils to complete huge quantities of work. Each family is different, and while the phrase "home schooling" gets used occasionally (as above by the BBC and also in Miss Warner's recent YouTube assembly), we must be clear that this is not what is happening. Home schooling is a choice, which families would have time to prepare for. You are looking after your children, and doing the best you can in difficult circumstances, as indeed are we as a school. Mental wellbeing must be our first priority.***

*We want you to be aware that we are already working on our curriculum for when the world returns to normal. We know there will be a lot of catching up to do this is something we know we need to be ready for.*

### **Support for families**

We wish to continue to support our families that may require pastoral or safeguarding support during this difficult time for everyone. Should you need access to pastoral support please email: [lfox@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk](mailto:lfox@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk), [krichardson@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk](mailto:krichardson@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk), [hknight@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk](mailto:hknight@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk) These email addresses will be checked regularly and we will endeavour to respond by email, or a phone call where possible, with any advice we can offer or to signpost you in the right direction. We will still be able to liaise with outside agencies such as Health, Early Help and Children's Services. Should you need to contact Children's Services in an emergency or for help and advice please call: 0300 300 8585

We would also like to share with you the following event from Children's Services.

First virtual Promoting Positive Wellbeing event.

This is a virtual workshop designed to promote positive emotional wellbeing. The topic will be Fears and anxieties around covid-19 and self-care in isolation. These sessions are

designed for the whole family and there will be information on self-care for parents and children of all ages.

Please sign up using the link below. An email with join instructions will be sent the day before the session.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/promoting-positive-emotional-wellbeing-tickets-103340899412>

### **Information from the Department for Education**

The department for Education has updated their advice for parents of primary school aged children on supporting them with their learning. A lot of this is also relevant to years 7 and 8 and it is therefore worth reading. The full documents can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-primary-school-children-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

A summary of some of the most relevant points:

While staying at home due to coronavirus (COVID-19), parents and carers will be concerned about their children's education and the impact of missing school. No one expects parents to act as teachers, or to provide the activities and feedback that a school would. Speak to your school who will be planning work for your child to do. Parents and carers should do their best to help children and support their learning.

### **Structuring the day**

Do not worry about trying to maintain a full routine for your child like they had at school. But children will feel more comfortable and learn better with a predictable routine to the day, even if this is difficult.

When schools provide children with work they may give you advice on how to structure the day. But generally, you should try to make sure that they:

- get up and go to bed at the same time each day
- have regular meal times
- have regular breaks
- make time to be active - children are used to regular play at lunch and break times

### **Using digital devices**

Your child's school may set them work that can be done on a digital device such as a laptop, desktop, tablet or smartphone.

Set age-appropriate parental controls on any devices your child is using and supervise their use of websites and apps. See [advice on keeping them safe online](#) and talk to your child about online safety.

### **Year 3 to 6 children**

The best way to help children aged 7 to 11 learn is to:

- give them support and direction, but encourage them to do work independently too

- include active and practical things, rather than trying to make them sit and work for long periods
- try to break down the work into shorter periods, based on how long they can concentrate
- take frequent breaks
- praise or reward them when they do well

To check if they are learning try to:

- ask them questions as they go
- talk about things they learned

### **Talking**

Ask children to talk through what they have learned during the day and find time to talk with them more generally.

### **Reading**

Talk to your child about what they are reading. This will help them understand what they have read and encourage them to read for fun.

Ask your child questions about what they are reading. For example:

- ask questions that make them think about the story, such as how a character is feeling
- ask them to tell you what has happened in the story so far

Libraries are currently closed, however, you can find digital services they are providing at [Libraries Connected](#).

### **Writing**

Try to help children practise their writing. Work from school may be sent digitally, but using pen and paper will help children be ready for when they go back to school.

### **General Advice**

This can be a good time for them to follow their own interests. For example, for:

- history, by visiting the [English Heritage](#) website to explore England's history
- geography, by researching other countries
- science, by finding out more about the human body on [BBC Bitesize](#)
- art, by trying the activities on [TATE Kids](#)

There is additional guidance for parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/help-children-with-send-continue-their-education-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

The DfE have also updated their general advice for parents and carers regarding school closures. There is a lot of valuable information on this link, including access to more learning resources and information about Free School Meals:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

### **Closure for Bank Holiday 8<sup>th</sup> May**

School will be closed for the Bank Holiday on 8<sup>th</sup> May. If any key worker parents require support on this date, please contact us via email and we will work with other local schools and the Local Authority to ensure support is in place.

### **And finally**

Change is always going to happen, but it is not always something that is easy to cope with. The worldwide coronavirus pandemic is a change that all the humans on Earth are having to deal with, which puts a strain on everyone, at the same time!

We are creatures of habit. Many of you who are working from home, or a key worker out in the community, already have a routine. Those staying at home will have created some sort of routine of their own - taking part in an online physical activity, getting up later and going to bed later, going out for a walk, or simply chilling reading a book or playing online games.

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> April was '**Earth day**'. The 'stay at home' situation is reducing pollution and helping the climate. If you so wish, you could help create a habitat to support insects in your back garden, in a hedgerow or woodland, as well as supporting your own well-being. Here is how to build a bug hotel if you wanted to support Earth day, or do something different from your normal routine: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/build-a-bug-hotel/>

Stay safe

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Barrows', with a stylized, cursive script.

Julie Barrows  
Deputy Headteacher  
On behalf of the Alameda Leadership Team

# Coronavirus: How do I home-school my children and what does Bitesize offer?

By Ben Milne  
BBC News  
20 April 2020

Coronavirus pandemic

**Schools across the UK would normally be opening for the summer term about now.**

However, they remain closed to all but a few pupils and there is no current reopening timetable. Most parents are now responsible for their children's education. For many, working from home and supporting their children's school work is not easy.

BBC Bitesize has launched a big push to help children - and parents - with home-learning, but what's realistic, and where can parents find support?

## What can parents and children actually do?

First of all, there is little expectation that parents are able to replace teachers.

A **joint statement by the main teachers' unions** said that "we cannot home-school the nation's children". They acknowledged that many parents have their own complicated work patterns.

However, many schools provided learning packs when the lockdown started, and are trying to run some online learning - for this, they are relying on parents being able to supervise their children.

But what is more important, say educationalists, is maintaining a degree of normality, rather than worrying about a child's progress in English or maths.

Home-schooling for now is "about encouraging parents to help their children create regular routines and study habits", says Prof Becky Francis, of the UCL Institute of Education.

## How do I support my children?

"Recreating the school environment is really tricky," says Helena Gillespie, professor of learning and teaching in higher education at UEA.

But there are things she suggests you can do to make the experience relatively rewarding and stress-free:

- Set a routine - if possible, have children dressed and breakfasted by 08:30 on weekdays - this will help them adjust when schools reopen
- Identify a set time of day when you will help children with projects, and other times when they can do things by themselves

- To avoid children losing academic skills they don't practise, including reading, writing and maths, make these the most important daily sessions

## What resources are available?

The BBC has expanded content on its education service, **BBC Bitesize**, to provide **regular daily lessons in English, maths and other core subjects**.

BBC director general Tony Hall describes it as "the biggest education effort the BBC has ever undertaken". It includes:

- Bitesize Daily - six different 20-minute shows, each targeted at specific age groups from five to 14, covering maths, science and English, as well as subjects including history and geography
- more than 150 new lessons added every week to the Bitesize website and app
- advice for parents on home-schooling, and guides for pupils with special educational needs
- for older students, **BBC Four is showing evening programmes** to support the GCSE and A-level curriculum
- specific content for students in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The government has also announced that it is backing a new national online school, called Oak National Academy, to provide 180 hours of free lessons a week. It will offer content based on the curriculum, from Reception to Year 10, for teachers to use when planning remote learning. It also says **it will help provide laptops and internet connections** for some children in Year 10 who do not have access to a computer.

**Other resources include YouTube's Free School**, which offers a range of videos on topics as diverse as the US constitution, coral reefs and the solar system.

And **the organisation behind the Ted talks has a division called Ted-Ed**, full of "lessons worth sharing" from teachers around the globe.

## Out of the classroom

Apart from missing lessons, it is important to remember that school has a social function for children. As with adults, children's relationships with their friends are heavily restricted by lockdown regulations.

Keep up communication with the school and encourage children to keep in contact with their friends as much as possible - something with which younger children may need more encouragement and support.

**The Children's Commissioner's "digital 5 a day" campaign** gives tips on how children can connect with each other, and look after their own mental wellbeing.

Try also using this time to help children acquire life skills - such as hanging out the washing or stacking the dishwasher. Make the most of the opportunity to talk to each other more, for example by trying to have lunch together every day.

## When will children return to school?

There is currently no timetable for children to return to school in the UK before September, although this has not been ruled out.

A **paper by academics at University College London** recently questioned whether the closure of schools had any impact on controlling coronavirus. One of the authors, Prof Russell Viner, said its value should be weighed against the cost to children's education and mental health.

However, the government's chief medical officer, Prof Chris Whitty, responded that while schools were "not dangerous" for children during the pandemic, the decision to close them would slow the rise of infections.

In a move likely to be watched by other nations under lockdown, Denmark has now become the first European country **to start allowing children up to the age of 11 back to school.**

## How much should we be doing?

Prof Gillespie says that much depends on how young the child is, but "if they can stay focused for between an hour and three hours, a day that would be fantastic".

Guidance from teaching unions suggests children do no more than three hours' work a day.

But Prof Gillespie says parents should not worry too much on how much time the child spends learning: "It's much better to have a really successful hour where the child enjoys their work, then watches telly."

It's important to know when to bail out, she says, if things aren't going well and everyone is getting frustrated, she advises. "Don't beat yourself up - you can pick things up again tomorrow.

"Children won't remember finishing that geography homework, but they will remember how it made them feel and what the vibe in the house was like."

*Additional reporting by Ellie Lawrie*