



THE HARMONY TRUST

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Thursday, 14th January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are keeping safe and well in these challenging times.

I am writing to provide information about school meal provision during the current period of national restrictions and an update on school places for critical workers.

Critical workers

We are committed to ensuring our academies are open for children of critical workers. Our challenge is doing this safely and within our risk assessment as numbers of parents needing places are rising significantly in some academies. Our risk controls are designed to minimise transmission of the virus. Derby is a high COVID-19 infection area currently, and all our areas continue to see rising infection rates. Please can we therefore ask that parents consider the Government's guidance that:

“Children with at least one parent or carer who is a critical worker can go to school or college if required, but parents should keep their children at home if they can”.

I want to avoid the situation seen in other schools of Principals needing to restrict available places. I am sure we can do this by working together to keep the number of children in provision within the limits set by our risk controls – which is Bubbles of 15 to 20 depending on space and staffing. We are also working hard to ensure that all vulnerable children – including those without any access to IT at home – can attend school. **Your principal will be in touch if they are facing challenges around demand for places and how it affects the Bubble system. They will propose ways forward that ensure that there continue to be places for vulnerable children and those of critical workers.**

Our academies are also working hard to provide Remote Learning that matches the curriculum offer in school, so that every child can make good progress.

School meals

A hot meal will be provided to all children that are **eligible for benefits related Free School Meals** (FSM) and to all infant aged children who are attending school during the current period. This is children of critical workers and vulnerable children as defined in Government guidance issued earlier this week (link to the full guidance is below):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>

Chief Executive: Mr Antony Hughes

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We will **issue vouchers for all children entitled to benefits related free school meals who are not attending school during the lock-down period.** Please note this does not include those children who usually receive a free lunch through the Universal Infant Free School Meals Scheme. Food parcels will not be issued at this time as we believe vouchers give families more flexibility.

Where children cannot attend school and are eligible for Free School Meals, we have already issued vouchers to cover last week and this week. Further government guidance has now been published and I am pleased to say that the National Voucher Scheme will be re-instated from Monday 18th January 2021. Vouchers will be issued in the form of an eGift card and can be used in any of the following stores:

- Aldi
- Iceland
- McColl's
- Morrisons
- Tesco
- Sainsbury's
- Asda
- Waitrose
- M&S
- Company Shop Group

Vouchers must not be used for age-restricted items, such as alcohol, cigarettes or lottery tickets.

As this is a National Voucher Scheme administered by the Government we ask you to please be patient as it may take a couple of days for vouchers to be processed. We hope that you will receive vouchers as early as possible next week. Please only contact the academy if you have not received the voucher by Thursday 21st January.

Vouchers will be issued for each child and will be for the value of £30 to cover the two week period from Monday 18th January to Friday 29th January. At the end of the two-weeks, if your child still cannot attend school, you will receive a further voucher for the following two weeks leading up to the half-term break.

If you are unsure whether you are eligible for free school meals, you can check this by going to the following website:

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-free-school-meals>

Once again, **thank you so much** for your support, patience and understanding during a very challenging start to the Spring term.

Antony Hughes, CEO

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