

Dear parent/carer

School closure until Monday 30 November 2020

It is with regret – and after much reflection and careful analysis – that I have taken the very difficult decision to close Sandwich Technology School to all students until Monday 30 November. This decision has been taken after full consultation with Public Health England (PHE) and the Department for Education (DfE). As we have already informed you, we have had to ask students in Year 8 and Year 7 to self-isolate due to Covid-19 cases within their year group. This weekend we have heard that there is now another case in Year 10, so Year 10 students now also need to self-isolate.

Here are the facts that have led to this difficult decision to close. Within the space of 7 days there have been:

- 4 cases amongst the student body that have required students and staff to self-isolate;
- 8 further cases amongst the wider school community that have luckily (according to PHE) not required the school to take further action, but have been monitored carefully;
- 37 (out of 75) teaching staff who are now also required to self-isolate – some of these are as a direct result of the cases in school and some are for reasons outside of school;
- an increase in the number of lessons that are being covered by non-specialist teachers – this is now at about 50 per cent;
- our nearest Secondary School, Sir Roger Manwood's, which is experiencing similar issues, has reached the same decision.

I am sure you are aware that the number of infections in Kent has recently dramatically risen in all districts across the county. In Thanet, where a good proportion of our students live, this has been particularly acute. The weekly cases per one hundred thousand in Thanet is 443.9, which compares with an England-wide figure of 266.7. Currently, it has been reported that the R-rate for Kent is amongst the highest in the country. Therefore, it is highly likely that more cases within our community will have occurred this weekend that we would learn about tomorrow morning and that there will be more cases in the coming days. It is, unfortunately, now obvious that we do not have the capacity to open safely and to continue to provide quality education within school.

Since September the school has been preparing, in line with Government expectations, full pre-recorded lessons in case of such an eventuality. These are ready and in place for all year groups – we will write to you again about this tomorrow. It is our belief that, under these difficult circumstances, the students' education will be better served at home, following these lessons and knowing that they are safe, than being in school, often being taught by other teachers than their own, wondering if they may be sent home at any minute. This degree of uncertainty is not conducive to focussed learning.

I would like to take this opportunity to assure you that, at present, there is no evidence that any case has arisen through contact/transmission at school. However, as an extra precaution we are going to use the closure as an opportunity to enhance our already robust cleaning procedure by undertaking an additional deep clean of the whole school. For this reason, in the first week of school closure we are, unfortunately, unable to offer key worker school provision.

To summarise:

All years should not return to school until Monday 30 November and should follow the pre-recorded lessons provided as per their timetable.

- Year 7: Should continue to self-isolate in their homes up to and including Wednesday 25 November – after that date they may leave home, but not return to school until 30 November.
- Year 8: Should continue to self-isolate in their homes up to and including Thursday 19 November – after that date they may leave home, but not return to school until 30 November.

- Year 9: Are not required to self-isolate, but should be at home working during the school day.
- Year 10: Are now required to self-isolate until Friday 27 November, returning to school on the 30 November.
- Years 11, 12 & 13: Are not required to self-isolate, but should be at home working during the school day.

Family members of those who are required to self-isolate do not also need to self-isolate unless anyone in the family home shows symptoms, in which case everyone should self-isolate and organise a test as soon as possible.

I would like to finish by saying that I have not come into school on a Sunday afternoon to write this letter with any sense of pleasure and that I fully understand that this letter will be met with a mixture of emotions. To put it simply, I take my duty of care to the students and staff very seriously indeed and I simply cannot see any other way forward.

Please do everything that you can to encourage your sons and daughters to engage with the learning we are providing and we very much hope to welcome them back on Monday 30 November. Students are encouraged to check in with their school email on a daily basis and to contact their teachers by email if they need help. In the meantime, in keeping with the current national lock down, where possible, stay at home, stay safe.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tracey Savage', written in a cursive style.

Tracey Savage
Headteacher