



Reinforced Autoclaves Aerated Concrete (RAAC) BWCET TEMPORARY SCHOOL CLOSURE UPDATE St Leonard's Catholic School, Durham

Dear Parents and Carers,

At the beginning of this term, the DfE instructed the Trust that three schools should remain closed. This was due to the change in DfE guidance surrounding schools with RAAC present in their building construction. The Trust were advised that neither staff nor pupils could return to affected schools/classrooms and alternative arrangements must be made for all pupils and staff for the foreseeable future. At that point, the Trust, Headteachers and staff in school contacted parents to advise of the immediate closure. The unexpected, no-notice disruption for 1,500 St Leonard's pupils, their families and 150 staff was unavoidable following the change in guidance.

At the outset, surveyors confirmed that a small number of rooms at St Leonard's were safe to occupy and are RAAC free. Therefore, the following week at St Leonard's, each year group from Y7-Y11 were in school for 1 day each, for a full day of pastoral sessions to ensure the pupils had contact not only with each other, but also received direct support from the staff team. This included a range of induction activities including how to use Teams for online learning, and important updates about staying safe online.

A Task Force Team made up of School Leadership Team, Trust Leaders, the DfE and Local Authority have been working hard ever since the official notification to put the most appropriate and safe options into place for hosting all pupils face-to-face with their teachers as quickly as possible. The Task Force meets every day to discuss the progress being made towards full-time face-to-face education for all pupils. This has required a considerable amount of planning with our students' safety being the most important consideration in this process. The urgency of having our pupils back to face-to-face education as quickly as possible, must be managed simultaneously with our duty to explore several options including the occupancy of viable alternative premises at Durham University, County Hall and Ushaw College, as well as the use of temporary teaching/mobile accommodation. Whilst we are desperate to get everyone back to face-to-face learning 5 days per week, we will not relent on our duty to ensure Safeguarding is paramount.

Last week we were able to increase the amount of face-to-face teaching for all pupils. This increase in the amount of in-person teaching, together with live on-line lessons was welcomed by all staff and pupils. We are thankful that, due to the 2020 Covid pandemic teaching adaptations, our students and staff were able to return to on-line learning expectations very quickly, lesson delivery and remote learning in a structured and professional manner.

CEO: Mr N Hurn, OBE
T: 0191 823 9333 | E: info@bwcet.com | bwcet.com

Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales under company registration number 7890590.

Registered office: Barmston Court, Turbine Business Park, Nissan Way, Washington, SR5 3NY



This week the timetable now includes four days face-to-face teaching for Years 12 & 13, with Year 13 being accommodated at the Trust HQ in Washington. Years 7, 10 & 11 all have face-to-face teaching for two days this week. Years 8 & 9 are in one day this week with four days on-line learning. Arrangements are being made now to increase this for all year groups next week.

We completely understand the frustrations and disappointment of many parents of children at St Leonard's. Indeed, we share them. We need to get back to having all our school community benefit from our excellent team of staff, teaching face-to-face lessons as soon as practicably possible. Parents have been supportive of the fact that this decision was outside of the Trust and school control, and we appreciate that. We are keeping parents updated on our plans on a weekly basis. The coordination of planning the weekly timetable in the limited space we have is time-consuming and relentless for our staff. Thankfully, we have more on-site classrooms being deemed as safe by our surveyors in a staggered release. This will help extend our face-to-face provision to some degree.

Prior to the RAAC issue being escalated this September, St Leonard's had already been identified by the DfE as a school in need of replacement and was part of the Government's Schools Rebuilding Programme (SRP). The DfE have just shared this update with The Trust.

"The department are working with a Technical Advisor to look if this current situation presents any opportunity for the School Rebuilding Project to be accelerated at St. Leonard's. For example, a temporary solution is being considered alongside the impact on the SRP project. We are looking at efficiencies that might mean we can deliver the School Rebuilding Project more quickly."

As soon as any further update is available, we will share this with the school community.

Baroness Barran, MBE, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Education, is due to visit St Leonard's tomorrow in a supportive capacity to better understand the challenges being faced and how we can ensure our students get back to receiving the high levels of teaching we pride ourselves on.

Although it is early in the academic year, we are mindful of the concerns some pupils may have in terms of their examinations in the summer of 2024. During Covid there was a clear plan in place to support pupils during that incredibly disruptive period e.g. centre assessed grades (CAG). The Trust do not want any pupils to be disadvantaged through this unprecedented situation. Consequently, we have submitted a request to the Parliamentary Education Select Committee to provide assurances that:

- a. Our pupils taking exams at KS2, KS4 and KS5 will have the same or similar levels of special consideration.
- b. We will be able to adopt CAG for the duration of this upheaval.

CEO: Mr N Hurn, OBE
T: 0191 823 9333 | E: info@bwcet.com | bwcet.com

Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales under company registration number 7890590.

Registered office: Barmston Court, Turbine Business Park, Nissan Way, Washington, SR5 3NY



- c. We can be assured that, if we do employ CAG, that our pupils will not be disadvantaged in their lives going forward e.g. university or job applications?

We know that the Headteacher, Mr Chris Hammill, is keeping parents up to date with the latest position, but we wanted to ensure that we provide a formal response. I'm sure you can understand and appreciate the enormity of the challenge the school and Trust have faced to consider the availability and suitability of appropriate venues and options.

This has been, and continues to be, a very difficult time for all of us. We hope that you know that everyone at St Leonard's and Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust, are doing all that we can and will continue to do so, to provide face-to-face education as quickly as we can and in the best possible way.

Thank you for your continued support, patience and understanding.

Very best wishes,
Mr Nick Hurn OBE
Chief Executive Officer

CEO: Mr N Hurn, OBE
T: 0191 823 9333 | E: info@bwcet.com | bwcet.com

Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust a company limited by guarantee, registered in England and Wales under company registration number 7890590.

Registered office: Barmston Court, Turbine Business Park, Nissan Way, Washington, SR5 3NY