



## **Reinforced Autoclaves Aerated Concrete (RAAC) BWCET TEMPORARY SCHOOL CLOSURE St Benet's Catholic Primary School, Ouston**

27 September 2023

Dear Parents and Carers,

Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust is committed, first and foremost, to ensuring the safety of its staff and pupils and is taking proactive and extensive steps to address this challenging issue, while continuing to deliver education to pupils affected to the very best of its ability. Our schools and teachers are amazing and are busy dedicating their efforts to ensuring that education will continue. Our children remain our absolute priority.

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 St Benet's pupils, their families and staff was unavoidable following the change in guidance.

A Task Force Team made up of School Leadership, 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 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 pupils' 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, needed to be managed simultaneously with our duty to explore several options including the occupancy of viable alternative premises at St Bede's and Stanley Education Centre, as well as the use of temporary teaching/mobile accommodation. Whilst we are desperate to get the whole school community back together, we will not relent on our duty to ensure safeguarding is paramount.

We know that the Headteacher, Mrs Catherine Young, has written to all parents with the latest position, but we wanted to ensure that we also provide a formal response.

We are delighted that all St Benet's children have been back at school this week. I'm sure you can understand and appreciate the enormity of the challenge the school and Trust have faced to ensure the availability and suitability of appropriate venues.

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Hopefully, as parents, you will feel reassured that all the necessary safeguarding and health and safety risks have been considered and adhered to. The school have provided access to the relevant risk assessments for each venue.

This has been a very difficult time for all of us. We hope that you know that everyone at St Benet'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 in the best possible way.

Thank you for your continued support, patience and understanding.

Very best wishes,  
Mr Nick Hurn OBE  
Chief Executive Officer

### RAAC Questions & Response

There have been a few questions raised and we have therefore formalised responses, and we will add to this as more questions are raised.

Q1	Has a surveyor been out to assess the site.
A1	A technical surveyor has visited the school to assess the full extent of the situation.
Q2	If the answer to the above is yes, what is the extent of the damage.
A2	The Trust has been informed that there is RAAC present in the ceilings of all the classrooms, the hall and the children's toilets.
Q3	What is the short, medium and long-term plans for St Benet's, Ouston.
A3	<p><b>Short Term</b> Currently the Nursery and Reception children are in RAAC free parts of the school site. Y1 and Y2 are being transported to Stanley Education Centre and Y3 to Y6 are being transported to St Bede's Catholic School &amp; 6th Form. Although we appreciate that this is not ideal, we are grateful for the support of Durham County Council and our local secondary school. This arrangement will therefore continue to be in place until the end of this half term.</p> <p><b>Medum Term</b> We continue to have limited access to the school building and are awaiting a decision from the DfE as to the future of the building. Giving due consideration to the extent of RAAC and whether it can be made safe or not, our medium-term aim is to get the whole school community back together. On this basis and having considered all options available, the Trust Task Force, have made the decision to appropriately refurbish Stanley Education Centre to initially accommodate Y1 through to Y6. We believe this can be completed to provide an effective education site from the 30 October for the remainder of this term.</p> <p><b>Long Term</b></p>

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**Bishop Wilkinson**  
Catholic Education Trust

	We appreciate that you are concerned about the long-term future of St Benet's. The Trust is committed to working with the Local Governing Committee and the DfE to ensure that St Benet's continues to deliver high quality education to its pupils. In terms of the current school building, we are working with the DfE technical advisors to determine future options.
Q4	How long can the children attend the current temporary educational establishments.
A4	We have commitment from Durham County Council that we can utilise the Stanley Education Centre for as long as necessary, and the Trust is fully committed to providing required transport arrangements for the duration.
Q5	What are the alternative strategies if temporary accommodation on site is not feasible.
A5	As explained above, we have commitment from Durham County Council that we can utilise Stanley Education Centre for as long as necessary and this will initially accommodate Y1 through to Y6.

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