



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

28th 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 situation, 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.

Further to our letter dated 26th September 2023, we can confirm that we had a very positive meeting yesterday with the Minister for the Schools System Baroness Barran, as well as local MP, Mary Kelly Foy. Baroness Barran said: "Today I met parents and staff of St Leonard's to hear their views about how we can work together to minimise disruption to their children's education."

"Parents told me they want a clear timeline for a return to full face-to-face learning as soon as possible. I will hold a further meeting next week and support the school in setting these plans out in full, as well as give more parents the opportunity to join the discussion."

"St Leonard's School is already set to be rebuilt as part of our School Rebuilding Programme and we are working at pace to conclude feasibility work so that procurement, planning and construction can go ahead as quickly as possible."

Further to the discussions and ongoing progress of plans, the Trust would like to provide a more detailed update as follows:

- The challenge involving the displacement of 1,490 students, with limited notice has been significant and cannot be underestimated.
- The Trust Task Force meets daily to ensure swift progress is being made to secure face-to-face education as soon as possible, but each day brings different challenges.
- The school and Trust will not relent on our duty of care to ensure students are safe in all circumstances and this is our foremost concern.
- All staff, school, Trust and partners, should be commended for their unwavering and continued efforts. Everyone is working tirelessly to provide a sustainable solution in the short and medium term.
- The DfE have been fantastic in supporting the school and the Trust and are part of the Task Force that meets daily to consider and identify suitable solutions.

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- A technical survey covering additional parts of the St Leonard's site is imminent. The survey will provide additional information relating to what additional areas might be available to use.
- The challenge to arrange suitable temporary accommodation, including services such as utilities and suitable facilities such as toilets has been considerable. Different options continue to be explored with partners, including Durham County Council.
- Parents continue to be supportive and understanding. Several parents met with the Minister for the Schools System today, to air their concerns. Baroness Barran is arranging to meet parents again next week.
- Baroness Barran has provided additional assurance that all financial liability associated with this situation will be fully covered by the DfE, where costs are agreed with DfE.
- The school's short-, medium- and long-term plan is divided into 3 phases:
 - Phase 1 – The school is aiming to have all students in face-to-face education after the half-term.
 - Phase 2 – This will be an enhanced version of phase 1 including specialist teaching provision such as Science Laboratories etc. and the options / timescales are currently being explored.
 - Phase 3 – This will be the continued development of the School Rebuild. The Minister has confirmed that DfE colleagues are working at pace to conclude feasibility work so that procurement, planning and construction can go ahead as quickly as possible.
- The school and Trust are being completely open with communication but have been cautious to ensure the information shared is accurate and in the best interests of all students.
- The Trust Task Force will hold an online parents' forum week beginning the 9 October. We will share more details towards the end of next week.

This situation 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 is doing everything possible to provide face-to-face education as quickly as we can and in the best possible way and we will continue to do so.

Thank you for your continued support, patience and understanding.

Very best wishes,
Mr Nick Hurn OBE
Chief Executive Officer

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