

EMBARGOED 00.01 THURSDAY, 30 APRIL 2020

Schools to remain closed until after the May half-term break

The Education Minister has signed a further Ministerial Decision, based on the latest advice from the Medical Officer of Health, to extend the closure of the majority of Government-provided schools and colleges to 22 May, the start of the Summer half-term holiday.

The Ministerial decision further states that Highlands College, which doesn't have a Summer half-term break, will be closed until 29 May.

The exceptions to this extension are the two special schools La Sente and Mont à l'Abbé School.

As previously, non-Government provided schools, early years settings, childminders and private nurseries are being advised to do the same.

This means that the earliest that schools and colleges could reopen is Monday, 1 June after the end of the Summer half-term break. This date will be kept under continuous review.

Early years settings, childminders and private nurseries, schools and colleges will continue to provide places to support critical workers' children and some vulnerable children throughout this period.

During this next month of closure, the Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department will be working with headteachers, trades unions and others to develop plans for the eventual phased safe return to childcare, schools and colleges of all children, pupils and students. This planning will, as with all decisions, be based on advice from health professionals.

The Education Minister has also requested that, as part of the Government's Safe Exit planning, consideration is given as to whether over the coming four weeks the numbers of children and young people attending early years settings, childminders and private nurseries might be increased.

In a statement the Education Minister, Senator Tracey Vallois, said: "Firstly, I would like to thank parents, carers and students for their understanding during this unsettling and difficult period. I know that, as parent myself, these have been testing times but the feedback I have received is that parents are doing a wonderful job home-schooling and our students are working so hard on their learning.

"I would also like to acknowledge and thank everyone in our childcare settings, schools and colleges, and across the Children, Young People, Education and Skills Department, for the huge amount of work that has been undertaken to provide continuity of care and learning. I am especially pleased with the support provided to pupils and students through online platforms, email and other resources.

"For those students taking formal qualifications, I remain saddened that they will not be able to undertake final examinations but am grateful for the commitment shown by teachers who are undertaking additional assessments to support the revised process of assessment and grading."

The Education Minister has also provided an update on the ongoing work of the new project team that has been set up to review the funding and fee issues related to nurseries, schools and colleges.

Senator Vallois said: "I would like to thank parents and carers for continuing to pay fees and for understanding the difficult position our fee-paying schools are facing. Continuing to pay these fees is crucial to the sustainability of our schools and underpins the alternative on-line learning and teaching arrangements that the schools and colleges have put in place.

"I recognise that there is a desire for normal service to resume as soon as possible and, for that reason alone, we share a strong commitment to the ongoing viability of our schools.

"Appreciating the pressures that many family incomes are under, I am pleased to advise the Boards of Governors of the Government-provided fee-paying schools have recommended that previously approved fee increases, due to start from the autumn term, should not be implemented. I have readily accepted this recommendation and, therefore, fees will be frozen until the end of 2020, providing budgeting certainty and reduced costs for parents.

"The position for 2021 will be reviewed in due course as the longer-term implications of the pandemic on schools becomes clearer.

The Minister added: "I understand and recognise that for some parents, the impact COVID-19 will be having on personal finances and that paying fees may be increasingly difficult or out of reach. Parents whose income is impacted should, in the first instance, contact their school in the normal way for a confidential discussion. Our fee-paying schools have existing hardship schemes and can discuss with parents how and when these can be accessed.

“To support these schools and parents, we are developing options that, if implemented, could supplement the hardship funds already managed by schools should they become insufficient to cater for demand. I will provide a further update on this work in a future announcement.”

Notes to Editors

1. For further information, please contact the press office on 01534 440430 or pressoffice@gov.je
2. Government Fee-paying schools are: Jersey College for Girls, Jersey College Prep., Victoria College and Victoria College Prep.