



HM Government of Gibraltar

Ministry of the Environment,
Sustainability, Climate Change,
Heritage, Education and Culture

PRESS RELEASE

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Plans for HMGoG Schools and Educational Settings

As a result of the increased number of positive COVID-19 cases in our community, all Government schools and educational settings will be closed for the following 2 weeks, with an initial opening date set for Monday 25th January 2021. Government schools will therefore now NOT open on Monday 11th January. This position will be reviewed weekly by the Government, the Department of Education and NASUWT who will take account of infection rates and hospitalisations in the community as well as Public Health advice in order to arrive at a decision.

St Martin's School

The Government recognises that temporary school closure is more disruptive and stressful for the pupils of St Martin's School and their families. As such, it has been decided to review the position of temporary school closure for this school at the end of the coming week, after 5 days of school closure, to see if it would be possible to reopen St Martin's on Monday 18th January. The nature of schooling at St Martin's is such that social distancing can often not be maintained and so it is considered that with high prevalence of the virus the risk of infection which could spread within the school, is higher, which is why St Martin's will not open on the 11th either.

Contingency learning

Contingency learning programmes will run online throughout the period of temporary school closure. Contingency learning will commence on Monday 11th January. Programmes will be formulated and managed by each school following guidance from the Department of Education. Schools will be in direct communication with the pupils and teachers will interact periodically with pupils for whom they are responsible. Each school and educational setting will inform its pupils and parents about the details of their programme before Monday 11th January.

The Department of Education has published the Contingency Learning Guidelines issued to HMGoG schools. This document has been developed in consultation with the NASUWT Gibraltar and provides HMGoG schools with guidelines of the expectations on the delivery of the curriculum whilst pupils are unable to attend schools. The guidelines also provide pupils and parents with guidance on what to expect with respect to contingency learning, not only now in the immediate situation of school closures, but also in regard to what to expect as we continue to work through this pandemic. The Contingency Learning Guidelines can be found on www.education.gov.gi.



Parents are asked to familiarise themselves with the guidelines so that they are aware of the role each key stakeholder in the contingency learning dynamic should play.

Carefully constructed asynchronous learning will continue to support pupils in the development of their skills, in the development of their understanding and will support their acquisition of knowledge. It will provide the pupils with hands-on learning opportunities and will ensure they engage actively with the learning concepts at hand.

The Department of Education asks parents and young people to familiarise themselves with their school's contingency learning offering at the earliest opportunity and encourages learners to prepare to get back into a learning mode for Monday 11th.

Child supervision

Parents should NOT send their children to school and will need to make alternative arrangements. This will in many cases be inconvenient, but we need to consider the situation that we are in and that many members of the community are having to make unusual and often difficult changes to their lives. Moreover, if the 'circuit breaker' is to be effective in stopping infection, it is best to keep children at home and not in contact with others.

A limited number of children will be catered for, during normal school hours, but only when both parents are key front-line workers who have to work at the same time and only for those days when that is the case. Such parents must apply for this facility through their heads of department and not directly to the school or the Department of Education. There will not be a public subscription as there was during the last lockdown.

Employers are asked to show flexibility and support those parents who need to spend time at home during these unusual and critical times.

The child supervision service is only open to children of school age who are enrolled in government schools and will run throughout the course of the usual school day (09:00 to 15:00 for Lower Primary aged children; 09:00 to 15:30 for Upper Primary and Secondary aged children). Parents should note that the service provided will be a supervisory service only and will not include any focus on contingency learning. Parents will have to work with their children on the contingency learning materials at a time convenient to them, once the children are back at home.

Pupil Wellbeing

The Department of Education recognises that many children and families will find the current lockdown situation very difficult and the period of temporary school closure may bring about further worries and anxieties in our young people. The Department of Education and its schools and educational settings will continue to actively reach out to its young people and will provide additional channels of communication and support to its more vulnerable pupils. School staff and counsellors will continue to actively engage with learners and their families to support them as best as possible during this challenging time.



As in the previous lockdown schools will continue to monitor the well-being of children; the reach out programme will continue to operate. Schools will endeavour to maintain contact with families by telephone, email or school electronic platforms. Parents are also encouraged to contact schools if they have a worry or concern. They may use the school's direct number or email, or alternatively contact the department of education and ask for a teacher to call back.

School counselors will maintain contact with their current student caseloads but will also make themselves available to help with other student or parent mental health concerns. There will be a number of communication channels made available: Facebook, Instagram pages and they will also make a phone number available for direct calls or messages.

In order to help young people keep physically and mentally fit, the Department of Education encourages families to try and establish a sense of routine during weekdays and to ensure this includes a range of activities within the household. Parents are asked to do what they can to ensure their children complete the contingency learning programme scheduled for each day at a time that best fits the familial circumstances. Whilst helping children to continue progressing through their curriculum is important, the Department of Education would like to stress that it is not to be all and end all during these unprecedented times. These are extraordinary times and the Department of Education would like to remind parents that education is not only about an academic process. It is more important to offer your child help, support and encouragement than on completing all activities or achieving results. We envisage that contingency learning will run for a short period of time and that we will soon return to some sense of normality.

The Department acknowledges that this will be a testing time for the community, as remote learning is not without challenges. However, the Department is confident that teachers will be doing their utmost to support their learners throughout the period of temporary school closure and that learners will adapt to this new way of working. "Together with parental support, we can work as teams around each child to continue to support their learning journey. We urge households to adopt as positive a mindset as they can muster, and do their best within the current challenges our community is facing. By working together, we can all do our bit to get our community back to normality sooner rather than later", said a spokesperson.

Minister for Education, the Hon Prof John Cortes stated "Everyone in Education is working hard to ensure that we deliver a meaningful learning experience, and I am very grateful to teachers, LSAs and everyone else for their work to this end.

"And I want to pay special tribute to the children of Gibraltar. They are the silent sufferers in all of this. They do not express their views or vent their frustration through social media, but their lives have been changed so drastically over the past year. They've been without schooling for large periods, not seeing friends, cousins, grandparents. And yet they still smile and they still laugh, resilient and strong in a way that us adults can no longer be. And I want to assure them that all of us in the community, parents, grandparents, teachers, LSAs, support workers, everyone, will do all that we can to ensure that their learning continues and that their lives are back to normal as soon as humanly possible."

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