

Advice for parents: COVID-19 School Closure FAQs

What does the extended Easter break mean for Secondary school students?

As we enter the second week of what we hope will be a four week extended Easter break, parents & carers will want to make sure their children are making the best use of the time away from school. This last week or so has been confusing and stressful for everyone - students, parents & carers, teachers. But, it has also given us lots of reasons to be optimistic, as we have seen our community, including our children and young people, pulling together and supporting each other.

This document hopes to provide parents & carers with information and guidance about the current approaches and expectations for secondary school students in Guernsey.

Is this a school holiday or are students expected to do school work?

The start of the Easter break may have been brought forward, but nothing about the present circumstances could be described as normal. The usual holiday activities - trips off-island, visits and outings, spending time with friends - have all been significantly limited to protect our community from the spread of coronavirus. Whilst time spent with family would be a usual feature of school holidays, the current reduction in activities and the isolation and social distancing requirements are likely to put added pressure on families.

During any usual school holiday, we would expect secondary school students to be engaged in learning, educational activities and home study. We would expect the same now - it is even more important given the longer time away from formal schooling. As always, educational activities during school holidays - usual or extended - will depend on age, aptitudes, interests and personal or home circumstances, which need to be taken into account.

Further to recent announcements that all of our UK and international examinations have been cancelled for this summer, some information has been provided about the basis on which grades will be awarded; however, further information is expected this week and the situation will continue to be monitored closely. More information can be found in the Department for Education [statement](#) released on 20 March 2020.

What information is available about learning activities for schools?

The Head Teachers from each of our secondary schools have already provided parents & carers with information and guidance about what is in place for students, whether through school websites, social media pages, virtual school platforms (such as Google Classroom), home learning and planner systems (such as MILK or ClassCharts). Please refer to the advice you have been given in the first instance.

Each school has organised staff into teams and are operating a rota system so that each school site can remain open for children of key workers. Therefore, some staff will be working on site, many will be working from home, and others will be self-isolating or supporting their own family members; others will be taking an early break so that they can staff the school sites or work from home during the standard, two-week Easter holiday.

There are so many additional resources available online, how do I know which ones are helpful for my child?

Each school has provided tasks and activities for students to complete and it is recommended that parents & carers support their children to focus on these first. What this looks like for a Year 7 student may well be very different for an older student studying for their GCSEs or A Levels.

There are many websites and resources available on line and it can feel overwhelming, and confusing, to know where to start. Please refer to the advice each school has already given as trying to do too much with students risks making them feel confused about what they have learned.

A trusted source for education material however is the BBC, who are currently working closely with the Department for Education (DfE). The BBC websites are home to thousands of free educational videos, guides and audio clips. The sites are free, arranged by age group and subject. In particular, for guides and activities designed to support students with independent learning, there is a wealth of free resources on [BBC Bitesize](#). For parents, carers and students of all ages, [BBC Teach](#) has helpful advice for parents on learning at home.

Should students decide what they need to do each day and when?

We all feel better with structure, even in holidays, and probably more so in the current environment. Many students will miss school, their friends and their teachers and they may find the lack of structure overwhelming. Supporting your children to organise themselves is key. You know your child best; some of our students are superbly organised and may even go too far in trying to organise every moment. Please don't try to replicate exactly the school day - some flexibility is required - and make sure there is plenty of time each day for exercise and relaxation. Try to ensure there are clear boundaries between learning (or work) and free time, which is good advice for all those who are trying to work from home at this time.

Where should students spend time on their homework/independent learning?

Some families have plenty of space in their homes and for others space may be more limited. Where possible try to make arrangements to allow students the space to learn independently with a desk or work surface. Some students will have access to a number of devices in the home, for others it may be that the family has to share a single PC or tablet device. Our secondary schools have tried to support the students with access to devices, prioritising the older students. We are confident, for example, that all students in the Sixth Form have access to a device as this was already a part of one-to-one study arrangements in the Sixth Form Centre. Although access to the internet for home is high in Guernsey, we know there are families in our community who do not have access to the internet and schools have provided some students with dongles; we continue to work with phone providers to try and find solutions for those who do not have access at the moment.

How much is too much? What should secondary school students be doing?

There are no hard and fast rules. Every family circumstance is different. Do not worry about what your friend, neighbour or social media contacts tell you their children are doing each day. However, it is a good idea to seek support and ideas from others and in the first instance, starting with the advice provided by your child's school. Remember, staff in our schools are still available for you to contact with any questions or concerns. It's okay to be unsure, nervous, and even a little scared - most of you are not trained teachers! We do not expect that you are able to support your children at home as a 'replacement' for schools and we have not, at this stage, moved to a more formal arrangement for virtual schooling.

The general advice for the next three weeks is that this is an extended Easter break. As noted above, for secondary-age students, it would be normal to expect some independent or supported learning to take place during holidays. This is especially so for students in Years 10 and 11 (studying KS4 courses) and in post-16 studies, whether at the Sixth Form or the College of Further Education.

It is reasonable, therefore, to suggest that students should be engaged in some sort of learning activity on a daily basis. Educational research has indicated that children spending time on their school work outside of formal lessons can support their progression and achievement. This is just as true in the period of school breaks, though it is important that students ensure that they do have a rest from the previous school term and spend time with their families.

For secondary school students, it is important to:

- Prioritise **well-being** - remember to take the time each day for exercise and relaxation. Schools have provided great resources for this, including material provided by the Health Improvement Commission about [being active at home](#).

- **Consolidate learning** - concentrate on what has already been learned to date; revising, reviewing material and retrieval practice.
- Spend time every day **reading** - where possible read from paper-based sources (books!) not just from screens. Although our libraries are now closed, you can still borrow audio books and e-books. Students should already be members, but can [register here](#)
- **Limit screen time** - it is important for friends to stay in contact with each other (as long as interactions are friendly and supportive) and modern technologies are a great way to do this – but students should avoid an unhealthy over-reliance on screen time in all of its guises. Too much screen time has very negative effects on physical and mental health and it disrupts sleep patterns as well. Variety is key: exercising, reading a great book and learning a new skill are all suitable ways of avoiding the monotony of a TV and computer screen.
- **Routine is key** - make a timetable that works both for the student and for the family overall. It is important to allow students some independence to create their own structure or timetable for the day, combining their ideas and home learning. If they try to schedule double PlayStation every morning, then it's probably time for parents to step in, but give them the option first. A lot of parents will be impressed with the outcome.

I am still not sure about something relating to my child's school, can I contact school during the extended Easter break?

When staff are not required in schools to support the children of key workers, they are working remotely. Some will also be self-isolating, taking care of others, or taking an early break to provide cover over the scheduled, two-week Easter Break. Please follow the usual school guidelines in order to make contact. There is someone available on each school site each weekday and they will be able to put you in touch with the best member of staff to support your questions or concerns. It may be that a response will not be immediate, so please bear with us.

You can also contact the Education Office on 01481 733017 or email educationsportandculture@gov.gg and a member of the team there will try to support you.