

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am writing to you with an unusual request and an appeal for your support. I don't need to tell you about the coronavirus (Covid-19) itself – our media is currently full of reports on the outbreak.

My main concern is for your children and families. I would like to protect our school children, while at the same time maintaining a sense of normality for us all. To do this, however, I need your assistance and support.

Yesterday, the Federal Government introduced a variety of measures to contain the outbreak. These measures affect schools in particular. They are primarily designed to protect those who are at higher risk of becoming seriously ill with the coronavirus. However, the measures can only be fully effective and successful if we all pull together.

Until the start of the Easter holidays, I would ask you to comply with the following request, depending on the age of your child:

- If your child attends a primary school, new secondary school (*Neue Mittelschule*), the lower level of an academic secondary school (AHS) or a special school, he or she will not have regular lessons from Wednesday 18 March 2020 until the start of the Easter holidays. If possible, please arrange for your child to be looked after at home. If you are unable to organise childcare at home (especially if you work in a critical area, in particular health, safety, food retail or transport infrastructure, or you are a single parent), he or she can continue to attend school, where children will work on exercises and other activities to build on what they have already learned.
- If your child attends the upper level of an academic secondary school (AHS), a college for higher vocational education (*berufsbildende höhere Schule*), a school for intermediate vocational education (*berufsbildende mittlere Schule*) such as a school of business administration (*Handelsschule*) or specialist school (*Fachschule*), part-time vocational school (*Berufsschule*) or pre-vocational school (*Polytechnische Schule*), no teaching will take place from Monday 16 March 2020 until the start of the Easter holidays. Your child should study at home, revising and building on topics that they have already covered in class. Schools will provide pupils with a variety of study materials to enable them to work at home, including digital materials. Pupils will be able to pick up worksheets, study materials and any documents they need, subject to the stricter hygiene regulations in place.
- Please avoid using grandparents for childcare (particularly if they are over about 65, as this age group is at greater risk) because these are the people we want to protect as best we can.

At this point, I can assure you that your child will not miss out on any teaching if he or she does not go to school: teachers will only revise and expand on topics that have already been covered.

If you have any questions, please contact your school directly. Teaching staff will continue to be at the school and we will work together to manage this unprecedented situation.

By making a conscious decision to reduce personal contact, you are playing an important role in helping the people close to you to stay healthy.

Please believe me when I say that these adjustments, which are now required of us all, are not easy for me either. I am a father and grandfather myself, and know what such drastic changes in the day-to-day life of a family mean. However, I am convinced that we now need to take this important step together for the sake of our children and fellow citizens. I can assure you that, in partnership with federal states and municipalities, the education authorities and all our subordinate agencies, we will make every effort to navigate the coming weeks as best as possible.

The key points of the regulation can be found in the **Decree on Handling of the Coronavirus by the Education System** (*Umgang des Bildungssystems mit dem Coronavirus – Erlass*) at www.bmbwf.gv.at/corona_info (in German). Daily updates on the situation are also available at this link.

With my best wishes and thanks for your cooperation,

Heinz Fassmann