

London Coronavirus: Exclusive Chelsea private girls' school shuts after 'unhelpful' Government advice

The headteacher of Francis Holland School, which boasts Sienna Miller and Cara Delevingne as ex-pupils, has now sent all students home



Francis Holland School (Image: Google)

A private girls schools in central London has closed over coronavirus fears while criticising the Government's advice as "unhelpful".

Francis Holland School in [Sloane Square, Chelsea](#), will close as of 4pm today (March 17) for an indefinite amount of time.

A letter to parents written by head teacher Lucy Elphinstone reads: "With a heavy heart but a clear conscience, I am closing the school (both junior and upper) from 4pm today.

"The Government announcement yesterday was confusing and largely unhelpful in its request for social distancing and avoiding mass gatherings, theatres, restaurants and pubs whilst not requiring schools to close."

Ministers have said they are keeping the option of closing schools under review.

There is speculation that such a ban could be ordered in London first, as the capital has seen one-third of all COVID-19 cases in the UK – currently more than 1,540.

The letter, which was shared on Twitter by Sunday Times columnist Charlotte Edwardes, continues: “I understand the concern about social care and the ability of the workforce in vital services to continue if children are at home, but my worry is for our community – not so much for children themselves ... but our teachers and vulnerable members of our families.

“I am not prepared to endanger these lives and so I am taking this unilateral decision.”

[Charlotte Edwardes](#) @chedwardes

Very striking how private sector schools closing ahead of state sector. Head of Francis Holland in Chelsea says her school closing probably for many weeks to protect “teachers and vulnerable members of our families” (see attached). And she attacks yesterday’s government...

FRANCIS HOLLAND SCHOOL
SLOANE SQUARE
Tuesday 17th March 2020

NOTICE TO PARENTS

Dear Parents

With a heavy heart but a clear conscience, I am closing the School (both Junior and Senior) from 4pm today. The Government announcement yesterday was confusing and largely unhelpful in its request for social distancing and avoidance of mass gatherings, theatres, restaurants and pubs whilst not requiring schools to close. In the light of the modelling they presented, this seems irresponsible. I understand the concern about social care and the ability of the workforce in vital services to continue if children are at home, but my worry is for our community – not so much for the children themselves who appear largely unaffected by the virus, but our teachers and vulnerable members of our families. I am not prepared to endanger these lives and so I am taking this unilateral decision.

There will be no in-school lessons going forward until it is deemed safe to reopen and I am aware that this may not be for many weeks. All teaching will continue online and I attach again our remote working guidelines which were sent last week. All pupils have been fully briefed on how to access their lessons and resources, and the staff will be at hand remotely for the rest of term to attend to all questions, mark work and give support. Exam candidates will be given particular attention.

Our GCSE art exam next Monday is postponed, perhaps cancelled. In this latter case, the grade will be awarded based on previous work. Our MFL orals, which were due to take place at the start of next term, will also have to be deferred. We await instructions from the Department for Education regarding the scheduling of GCSEs and A levels.

We will ensure that all pupils have all their work and belongings to take home this afternoon. Exam classes will receive particular instructions from all their teachers. There will be no panic, and we trust that our community will continue to show the courage and resilience which so characterises Francis Holland School.

I pray for us all. I pray that we will come together again at the end of this crisis having experienced the very best of human nature and God’s grace. I remain, of course, constantly at your service.

With warm good wishes


Lucy Elphinstone

Headmistress: Mrs L. Elphinstone MA (Cantab)

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Ms Elphinstone continues to say that the school, whose alumni includes actress **Sienna Miller** and model Cara Delevingne, will remain closed “until it is deemed safe to reopen”, which may not be for “many weeks”. She adds: “I pray that we will come together at the end of the crisis having experienced the very best of human nature and God’s grace.”

Another private girls school in Regent’s Park with the same name, and which is also run by the Francis Holland Schools Trust, has not closed.