

# COGNITA

11 February 2021

Dear Parents

It is hard to believe that it has been nearly a year since I last wrote to you about how we were working in partnership with your child's school to respond to the challenges of Covid-19. I thought I might share some reflections with you on developments over the last 12 months and how we are preparing to emerge positively from this highly disruptive event.

In the first lockdown there was a sense that we would soon see a return to normality and there was a surge of adrenaline as we adapted swiftly to online teaching and working from home. This time, parents, pupils, and staff are drawing on their reserves of energy to keep going, hoping that we can all get back to school in March as and when restrictions are lifted.

I think I speak on behalf of all my team by saying how very proud we are of the way in which our school communities have pulled together and adapted to the changing circumstances over the last year. We are all very proud of our pupils as they have shown discipline and keenness to learn during the pandemic. It is a particularly tough time for them, but teachers and support staff have shared with me many stories of their versatility and adaptability. Of course, the mental health and wellbeing of your children is our number one concern. Lack of socialising with peers, isolation and anxiety brought on by uncertainty about the future have all contributed to a surge in mental health issues across the UK. Fortunately, Cognita schools are well-placed to address this. Our pastoral approach continues even in the virtual world with many opportunities for children in terms of social connection and building community spirit. Equally, our teachers all look out for evidence of children who are at risk of wellbeing or mental health issues and our adoption of AS Tracking already being rolled out in many of our schools will increasingly help us monitor and address detrimental impacts on children where on the surface all seems fine. Our wellbeing programme continues to be an important focus to ensure all students can flourish.

I am also very proud of our teaching staff who have themselves been on a steep learning curve to adopt new software platforms which enable high quality online teaching including personalised learning pathways, use of breakout rooms, enhanced feedback to children, and tracking of progress. Teachers were trained to have the classroom as their 'stage' and spent years perfecting their teaching and differentiation skills, classroom management and motivation tactics in this format. How quickly they have learned to be masters of the virtual classroom as well!

Parents too have played a critical role in maintaining their children's focus on learning and we are extremely grateful for your partnership and support. We are very pleased that for the most part, the educational trajectory of our children has been maintained despite all the disruption of Covid-19, and we appreciate the kind and valuable feedback we have received from parents. Thank you. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's learning and/or wellbeing, I urge you to raise them with your child's school as soon as you can.

Cognita Europe has invested over £10m this year in Educational Technology, transforming our IT infrastructure and software and distributing laptops to all children from Years 3 to 13 in our 40 UK schools. As children move up into these year groups, they too will be given a device.

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This has underpinned our ability to maintain uninterrupted education of your children and has also released an explosion of online best practice sharing among our 2,000+ staff.

We were honoured that Cognita's EdTech strategy was cited by Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella as an exemplar in Europe at the recent British Educational Training and Technology (BETT) conference. Teachers have never worked harder to care for your children. Whilst most staff are teaching online, schools do remain open to look after Key Worker and vulnerable children. We currently have an average attendance of 10-15% across our schools, though for some this is over 30%. We have not furloughed any teaching staff so we can ensure the highest quality of provision during this lockdown.

At Cognita we have sought to contribute to the wider good of the education sector. We led a campaign to lobby government, along with HMC and several Multi Academy Trusts, to vaccinate the UK's 1m school staff over the half term break using a network of 150 school premises including our own. We have managed to push the subject of the early vaccination of teachers well up the government agenda and hope there may yet be a positive result for schools.

Whilst the pandemic has brought much sorrow and disruption, there are also some silver linings. At Cognita we feel energized by the prospect of leveraging the best opportunities provided by technology for teaching and learning in the future. This will work alongside our focus on developing character and the future skills required for our children to be successful in the society of the 2020s and 2030s.

Thank you for your ongoing support. We all remain committed to delivering the best possible educational experience for your child despite the constraints of the pandemic. We, like you, look forward to schools re-opening soon and are eager to welcome your children back.

Yours sincerely



**Stuart Rolland**  
Chief Executive Officer, Europe