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Edith Stein Catholic Academy Trust
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20th May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

Re: Iceland trip July 2020 – postponement

I am writing to you to give the unfortunate news that we have decided to postpone the Iceland trip this year. This has been a very difficult decision to take, but as time has progressed we felt that it was the only sensible course of action.

As of the 20th May, this is what is on the FCO website: *As countries respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, including travel and border restrictions, the FCO advises British nationals against all but essential international travel. Any country or area may restrict travel without notice.* Until that changed, we would not have been able to go to Iceland. Iceland itself currently has a 14 day quarantine requirement on entry to the country. The FCO website outlines that these measures might be relaxed by the end of June; there is a suggestion that Iceland will offer a coronavirus test on entry or the 14 day quarantine period. The problem with this is that we could have been tested at the airport and found that one (or more) of our students were asymptomatic but returned a positive test result. I am not sure how we would have been able to deal with that.

The decision has been taken on financial grounds too. Given how things have developed over the last two months, I could not envisage that our trip would go ahead in July. Cancellation seemed to be the most sensible option, but this was not financially viable. The booking conditions with our tour company stated that they would retain the majority of the money paid if we chose to cancel at this stage, so we simply could not do this. The insurer used by our tour company for our trip (Endsleigh), like many other insurers, exclude pandemic from 'coverable reasons'. Therefore, this was not an option either. We also have insurance through the Local Authority (Evolve-Hampshire Outdoor Education) provided by AIG. This policy excludes 'disinclination to travel'. If at/around the proposed date of our visit, the lockdown had been lifted and there was no Government/FCO/DFE restrictions in place for School visits, the Insurer could decline cover for cancellation claims where it cannot be shown that there are either governmental restrictions or medical reasons for the cancellation etc.

As cancellation was out of the question, essentially we had two options. The first was to simply proceed as though everything was normal. If our trip was cancelled due to FCO advice (we would only be able to know this within 1 to 2 weeks of the departure date), the company would have offered a refund credit note for the full amount paid up to that point. A refund credit note is an alternative to a cash refund. They have been introduced by ABTA and the CAA during this crisis to provide travel businesses with vital breathing space, whilst having consumer protection carried forward. This refund credit note can be used to rearrange a tour at a later date and, in the meantime, it is protected by ABTA /ATOL, so our money would have been safe and we would have been reimbursed if the travel company failed financially.

The refund credit note would expire on the 31st January 2021. If we had not used our credit note by this date, the tour company would have provided us with a full cash refund. At that point (start of February), the school would have been able to reimburse you.

Despite assurances from the company, I did not want to put this credit note promise and eventual refund to the test – especially as it is your money. We had only paid two deposits so far (about £9600, so £240 each). The final (sizeable) payment was due this week, which has brought this decision to a head. We wanted to keep that money safe. Also, if the trip had gone ahead, some of you may have had reservations about sending your child due to the health situation or the prospect of the 14 day quarantine on return to the UK. You would have lost all of your money due to ‘disinclination to travel’ as discussed earlier.

The second of the two options is the one we have decided to pursue. We have instructed the company that we wish to defer. This means that they will retain the money they have received from us so far (£9600) and issue us a credit note for this value to go towards a future trip. **We will refund you the whole amount that you have paid so far - please email finance@oaklandscatholicsschool.org with your bank details so that we can arrange the refund payment.** The school will take on the debt liability on this occasion. I have already started to organise the July/August 2021 trip with the company, which I hope to launch in late September. This means that your child would still have the opportunity to go and they would have first refusal. If we have spare places, then other students from Years 10-13 would be invited to join the trip. Hopefully, the places would be filled and the credit note could be utilised.

I know that both staff and students were really looking forward to the trip and I am sorry that we will not be able to go this summer, but I do hope that you understand the rationale behind our decision.

Yours faithfully,



Mark Bamford

Assistant Headteacher (i/c Iceland trip)