

15th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you are all keeping well and staying safe at the moment.

We are living through very challenging times, indeed. Listening to Government broadcasts can be a dispiriting process and it feels, at times, that the needs of school communities are being ignored or, at best, played down.

I wanted to give you further information about the position our Trust schools are in following on from the Prime Minister's announcement last weekend in which he gave June 1st as a possible date for schools to reopen.

I wanted to offer some clarity as this is a confusing and anxious time for everyone. Let me be clear; all of us want to get more pupils back into school as soon as it is safe to do so. School staff do not want to see classrooms empty for a day longer than they need to be. However, as any school leader will tell you, the first priority has to be the safety of everyone in the school community.

Unfortunately, there has been little transparency from central government about the science they are using to determine what we in schools will need to do and the vital decisions that need to be made. Any reintroduction of pupils into schools needs to be safe, practical and manageable. Reopening schools in the wake of the lockdown is a longer process than closing them.

In school settings it may be physically impossible to bring back the numbers of children being suggested at one go without either a more cautious phased return or part time places and, as the Department for Education recognise, it will not be possible to maintain any sense of social distancing, particularly in the Infant age range.

We are currently planning for a phased opening in each of our Trust schools from 1<sup>st</sup> June/8<sup>th</sup> June and the individual schools will give you more specific details about your particular school nearer the date.

In all our schools we will be phasing the return of our children beginning with the eldest children from the government's list of classes to return (Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6.) We are planning to begin with Year 6 because as the eldest children they are more likely to be able to understand and follow our new procedures. This is in order to minimise the risks and ensure that the procedures and measures we plan for, are implemented effectively and most importantly keep our children, families and staff safe.

We will also be closing our schools during the half term holiday period for all children and families to enable a thorough deep clean of the school in readiness for our phased return. Each school will give you the dates of closure in a further letter, explaining in more detail the individual plans for your school.

We shall be aiming to keep the children in smaller groups than their full class cohort to reduce the number of people they come into close contact with and ensuring that playgrounds are zoned and used in ways which, as far as possible keep all such groups separate and distant from each other whilst at play. Obviously, this is very new for our children and not the 'norm', hence us deciding to start with the older children and try to establish such practice, which we then plan to roll out to other suggested year groups, when it becomes safe to do so.

Unfortunately, this will not enable us to keep family groups together as we will only be open to key workers children, vulnerable children and the children in the year groups determined by the DfE, although, as I have explained, this will be phased.

The Department for Education (DfE) have quite rightly insisted that every school risk assess their particular circumstances. Clearly, the logistical issues of every school building necessitate such individual risk assessments, however we will, of course, be following all the current risk minimisation suggestions from the DfE, such as,

- planning to avoid pinch times at the school gates on entry and exit from school so we will have staggered start and end times to each day for different groups of children.
- ensuring that hygiene and hand washing regimes continue as often as possible.
- ensuring that school is cleaned thoroughly each evening.
- staggering break and playtimes and zoning the play areas for the different groups of children attending

Clearly, if we do indeed open, as this is dependent on how well Covid-19 infection rates are controlled between now and June 1<sup>st</sup>, there are risks that we will need to do our best to minimise but you may still prefer to keep your child at home and I can confirm that attendance will not be mandatory and is very much a matter for you to decide on, based on your own family circumstances.

I realise that many of you will have questions about what is going to happen in schools during the next months. At this stage all I can say is that currently we do not have all the answers; we, like you, are still trying to fully understand how we can implement this proposed phased return safely. As schools we are constantly receiving more information from government about what this may mean.

In the short term, nothing has changed; the same categories of children with parents who are front line workers that are unable to work from home, who have a social worker or who have high special needs, may attend school as a last resort for child care.

It may not be possible to expand pupil numbers in the way the Government has indicated from 1st June onwards, particularly where this would result in such large numbers of children attending school that it cannot be managed safely at the current time. I will update you following any changes to the current situation.

With kind regards,  
*Matt Whitehead*

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