



20 May 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, Governors and Staff

**RE: Pickwick Reopening Strategy**

Thank you for your patience with us over the last few days as we have worked together to understand and interpret the government's guidance regarding the possible reopening of schools to certain year groups in June. The purpose of this letter is to set out Pickwick Academy Trust's strategy for responding to this. The health and safety of our families, children and staff has been our number one priority in shaping this strategy.

As I mentioned in my last letter, the Prime Minister has made it clear that reopening would be conditional on the government's five tests being met:

1. Making sure the NHS can cope
2. A sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rate
3. Rate of infection decreasing to 'manageable levels'
4. Ensuring supply of tests and PPE can meet future demand
5. Being confident any adjustments would not risk a second peak that would overwhelm the NHS

The tests will be reviewed on 28 May and the government will decide whether to ask schools to reopen. As a result, the strategy and timeframe I am setting out below is conditional on the tests being met and the Board of Trustees being confident that each school's risk assessment and risk mitigation plans are robust.

It is important to note that this strategy is about reopening for *more* children. The majority of our schools have remained open throughout the lockdown period, including over the Easter holidays, delivering essential child-care and education provision for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Reopening timeframe

The government have asked all schools to "*plan for reopening for more children from 1 June, taking a phased approach initially for children in EYFS, Year 1 and Year 6*". We have carefully evaluated this approach and have decided that planning for all these children to return to school on the first day after half term at the same time is not viable. Instead we are planning a staggered reopening, with Year 6 children returning to school on Thursday 4 June, Year 1 on Monday 8 June and Reception on Thursday 11 June (the exception to this is Ludwell Primary School where these three year groups will return on 4 June due to smaller cohort sizes).

Our schools will remain closed to children on 1, 2 and 3 June (with the exception of vulnerable children and children of keyworkers) so that school leaders and staff can prepare the classrooms and school buildings by putting in place social distancing signage, decluttering rooms and setting up adapted spaces for the return of children in small groups. Delaying reopening also gives us time to respond to and communicate to you any changes in government direction that may be announced following the 28 May review of the five tests.

Schools will reopen on a 4-day a week basis (Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday) for Year 6, Year 1 and Reception children and will be closed every Wednesday (vulnerable children and children of key workers will continue to be able to come into school 5 days a week). This approach will enable us to do a thorough clean of each school, and will provide release time to enable teachers to continue delivering home learning activities for children still at home, alongside planning for and teaching their groups in school.

### Year group 'bubbles'

Children will be organised into groups based on their year group. These group 'bubbles' will have no more than 15 pupils (fewer where risk assessments indicate room size does not allow 15) to help provide some degree of social distancing in each room. Classrooms will be decluttered, removing a lot of furniture and equipment and desks will be spread out. Each bubble will be led by two members of staff - one teacher and one teaching assistant. It is possible that your child will not be taught by their usual class teacher and / or in their usual classroom. Staff, pupils and rooms will be assigned by school leaders sensitively, but it will not be possible to request changes due to the complexity of managing this situation. It is possible if our staffing situation changes that staff leading these bubbles will change across the term. The government has recognised that strict social distancing will not be possible for primary age children, so bubbles will be kept separate from each other, and children and staff will not be allowed to mix with other bubbles. This will apply at break and lunchtimes too. It is helpful to think of this approach as similar to households, where those within the household can interact but do not meet up with people in other households. Vulnerable children and children of key workers in Year 6, Year 1 and Reception will join their year group bubbles, and new bubbles will be created for vulnerable children and key worker children who are in Year 2, 3, 4 and 5.

### Arrangements for informing schools that you would like a place for your child

We have had a couple of requests this week from parents regarding our approach to offering places for key workers' children. To date we have only provided places for children where single parents or both parents are key workers. We have to be extremely careful not to overpopulate our schools at the moment, but if you are a key worker and have a child in Y2, 3, 4 or 5 and you have explored all other child-care options, please contact your school as we may have a limited number of places for children where one parent is a key worker.

Thank you for responding to the request already made by your school about whether you would like to take up a place for your Year 6, Year 1 or Reception child. Your responses and feedback have proved invaluable in helping us to shape our approach and risk assessments, and to consider what it is possible for us to deliver. Many of you have responded, quite reasonably, to say that you cannot confirm you would like a place yet as you don't know what the provision will look like. In the next couple of days your school will contact you with more details of the specific approach they will be taking to reopen for more children and will ask you now to confirm if you would like a place for your child. Due to the complexity and logistics of managing this situation we will be asking you to decide if you would like a place or not, and will not be offering part time or ad hoc attendance. If you decide not to accept a place you will not be able to change this decision for a period of two weeks – this is to help school leaders organise and manage the 'bubbles' to ensure group size and cohorts remain as consistent as possible, and limit the mixing of children.

Once each school knows how many children will be returning in June in each year group, school leaders will plan bubble cohorts, staffing and room allocation and will write to you confirming whether your child will be offered a place. It is our intention to be able to offer places to all

children in Y6, Y1, YR whose parents would like them to have a place. However, school leaders will need to carefully assess their staffing availability, room sizes, building constraints and take up rates. If risk assessments identify that it is not viable for all children to return to school, schools may need to adopt a 2 day a week approach for each bubble. If this happens children will be offered places on either Monday and Tuesday or Thursday and Friday.

### Managing the risks

It is important to be clear that we cannot eradicate all the risks associated with reopening our schools for more children. It is unlikely that there will be a vaccine for COVID-19 for some time, and the virus is still not fully understood. We are using all the latest guidance materials from the government, Public Health England and teaching unions to inform our strategy. Before reopening for more children, we will have robust risk assessments in place that have been agreed by governors and approved by our Board of Trustees. The risks and strategy we are planning to take will be evaluated constantly and adapted in response to need. If risks escalate or the situation changes we may reduce or close provision in response.

The decision whether to send your child back to school sits with you as parents/guardians. The government have made it clear that the usual attendance protocols will not be in place during the rest of the summer term, and they will not take out punitive measures against schools who do not have their full cohorts in school.

Examples of risk mitigation activities include:

- Use of small group sizes in socially distant 'bubbles'
- Staggered return for different year groups
- Strict personal hygiene rules and routines for staff and children
- Enhanced cleaning procedures and routines across the schools
- Risk assessing staff and children who identify as being medically vulnerable
- Risk assessing children whose behaviour may compromise the health and safety of others in their bubbles
- Ensuring numbers of children in school are manageable considering staffing levels, building constraints and take up rates
- Decluttering classrooms, removing equipment and furniture and spacing out desks to aid social distancing within bubbles
- Assigning washroom facilities and learning spaces; assigning space and time for outdoor activities
- Ensuring staff and children can wear PPE at their discretion (government guidance states that PPE will not normally be required in school settings); insisting that PPE is used for administering first aid and/or providing intimate care
- Avoid or restrict the use of communal areas such as halls and staffrooms
- Use staggered entry and exit times and locations; staggered breaks and lunchtimes
- Children will not bring bags or any equipment to school – equipment will be provided to ensure it is cleaned regularly
- Children bringing lunches bring it in a disposable bag (no lunchboxes); kitchens to provide lunches in individual bags/packaging
- School based approach to uniform, reflecting that children may have grown out of some items and that clothes must be washed daily
- Hand washing facilities will be available in each 'bubble' space and staff and children will wash their hands frequently throughout the day
- Rooms will be kept as well ventilated as possible with doors and windows open where possible

- Schools will do as much outdoor learning as possible, weather permitting

#### Education provision in school and at home

Education for those in school will not try to fully replicate pre-COVID-19 school experiences and is likely to focus on a recovery-based curriculum, well-being, mental health and transition activities. We will be limited in our approach to group or paired activities, and in the types of equipment and resources we will be able to use in school.

Schools will do as much outdoor learning as possible, with outdoor time scheduled and space defined for all bubbles, but outdoor play equipment may not be accessible due to the difficulty of ensuring surfaces remain clean.

We are committed to continuing to deliver home learning experiences for children who are not in school, but the approaches taken to this may change as each school will need the vast majority of its teachers to teach the bubbles. Home learning will continue but teachers may interact through online platforms such as Purple Mash, Tapestry and Seesaw less regularly, catching up on this work on Wednesdays. It could be that schools choose to direct children to other online resources such as Oak Academy or set weekly activities for children to choose from.

#### Thank you

As I mentioned in my last letter, when we reopen for more children we will enter another 'new normal' period which will not resemble our pre-COVID-19 educational provision for some time. I would like to take this opportunity to say a huge thank you to all the staff across all our schools who have managed this whole process with great professionalism, integrity and enthusiasm. As I'm sure you will understand, there is a great deal of anxiety around reopening for more children as we all try to do the best we can to deliver what is possible for the children and families we serve. The feedback I have seen from parents/guardians about how each school has handled the situation to date has been extremely positive and I would like to say a huge thank you to all of you as well for your patience, understanding, support and feedback. It is very much appreciated.

Apologies for the length of this letter but I thought it important to set out clearly the strategy Pickwick Academy Trust intends to take in response to the government's reopening plans, and share with you our thinking.

Your child's school will contact you this week with details about the specific approach they are taking within this strategy and will ask you to confirm if you would like a place for your child (Y6, Y1, YR).

We will continue to provide you with regular updates, via each school, as the situation evolves.

Thank you for your support at this challenging time – it is very much appreciated.

Yours faithfully,



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