



02 June 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, Governors and Staff

**RE: Pickwick Reopening Strategy – approved by the Trust Board**

Thank you once again for your patience with us over the last few days as we have continued to work together to respond to the government's plans to reopen schools for more children from this week. On 20 May, I outlined Pickwick Academy Trust's strategy for responding to this and explained that the strategy and timeframe was conditional on the government's five tests being met and the Board of Trustees being confident that each school's risk assessment and risk mitigation plans are robust.

On 28 May, the Prime Minister announced that their five tests have now been met and confirmed that schools should now begin to reopen. The health and safety of our families, children and staff has been our number one priority in shaping our strategy, and each school has written a robust risk assessment outlining the series of measures that they will put in place to reduce the risks around reopening. Risk assessments have been developed by the Heads and senior leaders at each school, shared with staff, and agreed by each local governing body. Last night, after a long and robust discussion, the Trust Board approved each school's risk assessment and as a result I can confirm that we are proceeding with our strategy and timeframe for reopening.

Reopening timeframe

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

We have adopted a cautious, phased return approach to reopening, with Year 6 children who want a place 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). This will reduce the number of adults and children coming in to school at the same time, and enable us to evaluate the risk mitigation measures we have put in place as we gradually reopen.

Remaining closed until 4 June (with the exception of vulnerable children and children of keyworkers) is providing time for school leaders and staff to 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.

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 (as well as key worker children groups). These group 'bubbles' will have no more than 15 pupils (fewer where building evaluations 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 if possible, and new bubbles will be created for vulnerable children and key worker children who are in Year 2, 3, 4 and 5.

In the event of someone within a bubble developing COVID-19 symptoms and needing to be sent home to be tested, everyone in that bubble will be asked to remain at home as a precaution while we wait for the outcome of the test. This risk mitigation measure is more robust than the government's guidance, but Trustees felt strongly that this was the right approach to protect staff and to ensure parents felt confident that their child was as protected as possible at school. If someone tests positive for COVID-19 everyone in that bubble would be required to self-isolate in line with government guidelines, and a decision will be made whether to close all or part of the school.

## 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 have used all the latest guidance materials from the government, Wiltshire Local Authority, Public Health England and teaching unions to inform our strategy.

Each school has developed a robust risk assessment and has outlined the risk mitigation measures they will implement to reduce the risk to your children and our staff, in order to confidently reopen our schools. The risks and strategy we are planning to take will be evaluated constantly and adapted in response to need.

It is critically important that all adults and children adhere to the rules and guidance set out by schools (e.g. around drop off/pick up arrangements, what can be brought to school, new school routines, risk mitigation measures etc). If the behaviour or conduct of someone puts the health and/or wellbeing of others at risk the school may withdraw the offer of a place.

## Reopening for more children

As you know, 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.

Thank you for responding to your school to inform them whether you would like a place for your Year 6, Year 1 or Reception child (or to request a place if you are a key worker). We now know the numbers of children who would like places and your school will contact you shortly to explain which bubble and teaching team your child will have when they return, and outline the specific details you will need to know regarding your child returning to school.

Please only bring your child to school if you have received a message from the school indicating that they have a place – due to staffing levels, the organisation of bubbles and our need to avoid mixing groups, schools will not be able to admit children who have not been offered a place.

Schools have evaluated their staffing availability, building and facilities constraints and the number of requests for places – in some cases schools will be able to offer places at 4 days a week, but in others the offer may be for 2 days a week (vulnerable children and children of key workers will continue to be able to come into school 5 days a week). It is important that we reopen for more children cautiously and do not overstretch what is possible for us to provide.

Due to the complexity and logistics of managing this situation we have asked you to decide if you would like a place or not, and will not be offering ad hoc attendance. If you have decided 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.

It is important to understand that the continued provision of places is dependent on schools being able to staff the bubbles and on our continuing review of the COVID-19 situation. If the situation changes, or the risk to the health and well-being of staff and/or children increases, we reserve the right to amend, reduce or stop provision at any time.

## 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 as we recognise that the majority of our children will still remain at home once we've reopened for more children, 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

I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to all the staff and governors across our schools who have worked so hard to prepare their reopening approaches in line with this strategy. We are very much looking forward to welcoming more children back to our schools, and to continuing to engage with those not yet back. Thank you for your support, patience and feedback as we continue to navigate through this process – it is very much appreciated.

Your child's school will contact you this week with details about the specific approach they are taking and to confirm the offer they are able to make for your child.

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

Yours faithfully,



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