



25 June 2020

Dear Parents, Carers, Governors and Staff

RE: Bringing all children back for some face-to-face time with their teachers before the summer holidays

I wrote to you at the beginning of June to outline our strategy for reopening our schools to Year 6, Year 1 and Reception, as well as children of key workers and vulnerable children, in line with government direction.

The health and safety of our families, children and staff has been our number one priority in shaping our strategy, and each school has a robust risk assessment outlining the series of measures in place to reduce the risks around reopening. These risk assessments have been developed by the Heads and senior leaders at each school, shared with staff, agreed by each local governing body and approved by the Trust Board. We are regularly reviewing all aspects of our reopening provision, and continue to evaluate and adapt our procedures.

From the 4 June we cautiously reopened for more children, using a phased approach, and are now operating 'bubble' groups across our schools. We have been delighted to welcome back more children into our schools, and it has been a pleasure to see how well children have settled back into school, taking the additional risk mitigation measures we have put in place in their stride. Thank you so much for the positive feedback you have given about the way our schools have handled this situation – the leaders, staff and governors in each school have worked tirelessly to ensure that reopening has been as smooth and stress-free as possible for the children, whilst continuing to engage in learning from home with the children not in school. Their professionalism, dedication and energy has been inspiring and much appreciated.

As I outlined in my previous letter, we have adopted a more robust risk mitigation measure than is suggested by the government in the event of someone within a bubble developing COVID-19 symptoms. If this happens, everyone in that bubble will be asked to remain at home as a precaution while we wait for the outcome of the test. 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. Over the last few weeks, across all our schools, we have had five people who have been tested following concerns around symptoms. All tests came back negative and we were able to quickly reopen our bubbles. Thank you for your patience, understanding and support around the approach we are taking, and for your feedback that this is helping you to feel confident that we are taking the situation seriously.

In order to facilitate requests for places and follow government guidance on safe reopening we are using all our available staff and space. As a result we have reached, or are close to reaching, capacity for children we can provide places for in each school. You will have heard that the government are planning to reduce national social distancing guidelines from 2m to 1m from 4 July. This may provide us with a little more capacity in our smaller classrooms, but we will still need to ensure our 'bubbles' do not exceed 15. The government has already recognised that strict social distancing will not be possible for primary age children, which is why we are ensuring that bubbles will be kept separate from each other, and children and staff will not be allowed to mix with other bubbles.

You will be aware that the government have changed their original intention to bring back all children 'for about a month before the end of the summer term' and are now asking schools to only offer additional places 'where they have the capacity to do so safely'. We are frustrated that we cannot move towards offering full time places to all pupils this term, so we are working on a strategy to provide at least some face-to-face time for all children to come into school before the end of term. This will provide the opportunity for every child to spend some time with their current class teacher before the end of term, see their classmates, engage in some closure and transition activities, and support teachers in preparing learning for September.

We will continue to adhere to the government's guidance and our existing strategy around the use of bubbles of no more than 15 children, social distancing between bubbles, personal hygiene routines and robust cleaning schedules, as well as continuing to use staggered starts/finishes and breaks/lunches. We will be revisiting our risk assessments and ensuring that we are confident that the offer we are making continues to keep our staff and your children as safe as possible. The main risk increase is that in the last couple of weeks of term staff will teach more than one bubble, as we move from our current bubble structure (key workers' children and Y6, Y1, YR) to one where children are taught in year group/class groups by their class teacher, with half the class in at a time. Where staff are shielding, we are exploring ways for these staff to teach remotely, supported in school by another member of staff. Each school is developing a bespoke approach to delivering this strategy and will communicate it to you over the next couple of days. In order to staff this we will have to change from our current bubble provision to this new model at the very end of the summer term.

As you know, the decision whether to send your child back to school sits with you as parents/carers, and continues to be the case with this offer. 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.

It is important to remember that the continued provision of places and the offer to bring back all children for some face-to-face time before the end of the summer term 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 continue to reserve the right to amend, reduce or stop provision at any time.

Summer holidays

Our schools will be closed over the summer holidays to all children, but where possible we will signpost parents/carers to child-care and/or holiday club provision.

September

The Prime Minister recently announced the intention to bring all children back full time in September, but we do not yet know what guidelines and/or restrictions might accompany this return, as the COVID-19 situation will require further review. It is possible that the details may not be published until mid-July or into the summer holidays, so we are working together across the Trust to develop and plan for several potential models that can be actioned once we know more from the government. Model A is a full time return with every child back in their class with their class teacher, without any type of social distancing or risk mitigation measures; Model B is as above but keeping normal class sized bubbles socially distant from each other and continuing to require staggered starts/lunches etc; Model C is every child in taught by their class teacher but in half classes of no more than 15 children on a part-time one week on, one week off basis; and Model D is something similar to what we are currently doing, focussing on certain

year groups, key workers' children and vulnerable children. Unfortunately, at this stage we are unable to confirm what September's provision will look like, but as soon as we have more information we will let you know.

Blended learning – at home and at school

Through the use of online platforms such as Tapestry, SeeSaw and Purple Mash, via paper-based learning packs sent home and through telephone call communication, we have seen fantastic engagement from children and their families in the learning that has been provided by teachers. I know that it has been challenging managing home and work commitments, but I want to say a huge thank you for your support and dedication around keeping learning going through this pandemic. There is a lot of discussion in the media stating that all children will 'be behind' as a result of COVID-19, but I have seen many examples where families are more involved in and more aware of what children are learning, which will have had a massive positive impact. I am keen that we capitalise on the successes of connecting more deeply with you in your children's learning and continue to develop the way we work together in partnership next year (even once we're all back) to ensure children's educational outcomes are actually better, not worse, as a result of this situation!

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 reopen their schools for more children this term. 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 in the next couple of days with details about the specific approach they are taking and to confirm the arrangements for providing some face-to-face time for all children who would like to come in.

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

Yours faithfully,



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