

All Parents and Carers

15th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

PHASED RETURN TO SCHOOL WHEN SAFE TO DO SO

I write to you to thank you for your excellent feedback about how my team of committed educational colleagues are supporting you and your child throughout this national emergency. We are working in school and outside of school every day and have been working through the holidays to support our pupils' families and community.

As you will know, the Prime Minister spoke to the nation on Sunday evening, 10th of May, signalling that he hopes to get the virus under further control and, where possible and safe, would like primary schools to admit pupils from designated year groups from Monday the 1st of June. Following the announcement, there has been a lot of concern and confusion about this. This still persists.

Further announcements and guidance from the Government have stated that special schools can, when safe to do so, and in discussion with parents, their staff team and local community members, determine if they can extend the opening to more pupils than they have in at present.

Earlier this week, the scientific adviser for the Department for Education told the Education Select Committee that he had not been involved in determining whether or not it is safe for children and their teachers, support staff, clerical, cleaning, and catering teams to mix in school. He told the Committee that he did not know how many children had died of COVID-19 or who were ill from it. In fact, he was unable to answer most of the Committee's questions about the validity of the science and risk of mainstream children attending school, let alone our precious children who have a range of medical, learning and social and communication difficulties. There is an emergency meeting with the Chief Medical Officer this afternoon to try and bottom the real health risks.

Many parents are very worried about the safety aspect of returning their children to school. Many whose children have underlying health needs are very anxious, as are those parents who are shielding or shielding family members or in vulnerability categories.

Likewise, some members of staff have concerns about passing the virus onto your children. In our special schools, the Government guidance is less prescriptive and has signalled that head teachers, working with parents, are best placed to make the most appropriate and safest decisions for all.

I and my team are working on how best we can support you, where appropriate and safe to do so. I will be writing to you in the coming weeks to be more specific about our proposals. I will as always take your views, worries, suggestions and solutions into consideration.

At this moment in time, there is significant uncertainty about how safe or not it is for our children to be in school, let alone a specialist school. The current guidance from the Department for Education keeps changing and has up to now stated that school staff do not need PPE (personal protective equipment); it is my view that we do in our schools. Social distancing is difficult and, in some instances, impossible to do in a classroom and with children who need the intensive support that some of our children do when in school.

It is clear to me at least that we are moving into not only a different phase of development, but also a very tricky and potentially very dangerous phase where the balance between freedoms and going back to work or school for some must be balanced against the very real risks of COVID-19 spread, which we know will be devastating to our families and pupils. We are, as the Prime Minister stated, at the very start of this change. We will be dealing with the virus and the issues stemming from it for a very, very long time. We will have to come to terms with new ways of doing things in general and in our schools; this is to keep us all safe.

I and my team, supported by a wide range of other professionals and experts, will be monitoring, assessing, and evaluating the guidance from Public Health England, the Government, professional bodies and influencers over the coming weeks. We will let you know what our considered view is about how and if we are able to increase the number of children safely in school.

We, like many of you, know it is important that children attend school and ideally nothing better would please me if that was the case. I do understand your many concerns and hope in the coming weeks the Government and its scientists are able to build both the trust and confidence of parents and carers, our teachers and education support staff, and our pupils. Some of you are worried that if your child does not attend school you will be fined. I can confirm in this context of COVID-19 I will not be supporting such an approach.

My team will contact you over the next three weeks or so to gain your views about this. I know things seem to change daily – that is why a calm and considered approach is, in my view, the best for all. That is why I have to let you know that at this time there are too many uncertainties to make a firm, safe and considered decision for us all.

Please feel free to contact me by leaving a message for me at school and I or a member of the team will get back to you as soon as we can. Let me know your thoughts, solutions and/or worries. Likewise, if you need any help in any other way, please let me know and I/we will do our best to help you. My team will be in touch soon so that you can discuss matters with them.

Please take care all and keep safe.

Kindest regards



Gary Nixon
Executive Principal