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18th June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Since March 2020 the world has changed in ways which we never would have imagined; indeed, on many occasions I can still scarcely believe the situation that we find ourselves in. Life has changed for everybody. I am sure that, like us in school, you hoped that we would be back and operating normally before the end of the summer.

The journey so far...

The final week before we closed school to most pupils was frantic. Services that support education were closing and cancelling appointments with our children, as it was not safe to make school visits. Our doors remained open to pupils and we continued life as normal in front of the children. Behind the scenes however, we were becoming increasingly concerned when all of the news reports painted a very serious picture. We closed school to all visitors and encouraged the children to hand wash so much that their hands and ours were sore.

We listened, along with the rest of the country, to the briefing on Wednesday 18th March 2020 as the government made their announcement on the partial closure of schools. We had no prior warning and there had been no consultation with schools. We had two days to close down a system - something that had never been done before. Thankfully the staff in school, as always, rose to this occasion and did everything they could to make the last few days pleasurable for the children while managing their own concerns and worries.

At this point the Department for Education (DfE) also informed us that the National Curriculum was suspended and that we would be required to provide childcare for the children of critical workers. The DfE assured us that they would be clear in their definition of critical workers so that there was adequate provision to maintain essential services during the pandemic. This guidance was published at Midnight on Thursday 19th March 2020 which meant that Headteachers and school leaders across the country worked tirelessly during that Friday so that they could start to organise a system of identifying those needing childcare provision. By the end of the day on Friday we had collected and analysed our data; planned skeleton staff to provide childcare, and began our learning around infection control and mitigating risk for staff and children. We were afraid as we opened up school on Monday 23rd March. Afraid for our families, afraid for our pupils, afraid for our colleagues, but proud to support the NHS and all key workers who had no alternative childcare options.

The support of the Local Authority and the other schools we work with during this period has been invaluable. We have worked together since the end of March to find ways to manage the difficult and ever changing education landscape. Over the past few weeks, we have been tasked with the complete redesign and reorganisation of our classrooms and other learning spaces in school to ensure that it is safe for a phased return of pupils. Following much research and thorough risk assessments, this has meant emptying classrooms of furniture, making signage and marking floors and footpaths to enable social distancing; sectioning off playground equipment and outdoor spaces; procuring adequate supplies of hand sanitiser as well as acquiring sufficient PPE for staff. Staff have been trained in these new routines and procedures. Revised timetables and new rotas have been drawn up to allocate staff to smaller groups of pupils, alongside opportunities for them to continue to provide home learning.

Our next steps...

The period of time since lockdown has been difficult for everyone, and the news with regards to plans for schools re-opening fully has been vague and forever changing which does not help. I know that this has left us all frustrated and disappointed. I believe it was misguided when the government raised expectations in terms of all primary children returning to school for the last weeks of the summer term. In reality, with the need to ensure social distancing and the availability of staff, schools were never going to be able to achieve this aim. In clarifying the government's position regarding the full opening of primary schools, the Secretary of State for Education has now accepted that most primary schools do not have the capacity, in terms of both physical space and staff, to welcome back all pupils.

We are hopeful that we have now turned a corner in the fight against Coronavirus and as the Director of Public Health advised, we are proceeding cautiously, in a measured way so that the number of new infections and deaths from Covid-19 continues to fall. Because of our capacity in terms of staff and classroom space, the needs of groups who have already returned to school, and the increased number of children requiring our key worker provision, we are having to limit the number of pupils we can take in school from the Y6, Y1 and Reception year groups. Our plans are as follows:

- Y6 pupils who requested a place through the survey to be welcomed back to school on Monday 22nd June
- Y1 pupils who requested a place to be welcomed back to school on Monday 29th June
- Reception pupils who requested a place to be welcomed back to school on Monday 29th June

Once we have a clear picture of the number of pupils in these groups we will review the staff availability and consider if we can welcome more pupils from these year groups into school. Please understand that all schools are working to specific risk assessments around their unique circumstances in terms of available staff and resources and so the situation will look very different across the system.

We will be in touch with all parents of children due to join Reception and Nursery in the near future regarding our programme for transition. We all know this will look very different from our usual system however we will do everything we can to ensure that your child has a smooth, positive transition into school.

We understand that this situation is far from ideal and is frustrating for both yourselves and your children. You, and they, will have many questions about the future, some of which we cannot answer ourselves at the moment. As a school, all staff and governors feel concerned for the children who remain at home. We know that many have been engaging with learning from school and doing lovely things at home however they will be missing their friends and teachers as much as we are missing them. If we were able to bring everyone back safely, believe me we would do it.

At present we all await the next announcement from the government to find out what arrangements they may have in mind for schools in September. I am continuing to work with the Local Authority and other leaders to make tentative plans going forward and once we have a clear picture of plans for summer and September I will be in touch.

Thank you for your continued support and understanding over the past months. Keep safe.

Regards,

Mrs Jenkinson (Headteacher)

