



Considerations for expanding school based provision

Tuesday 19th May 2020

Dear families,

I hope you are keeping as well as possible at this very difficult time. I would like to update you on the work taking place between school leaders, Governors, the Local Authority and other partners, like our facilities management provider, *Engie*, after the recent government announcement about schools ‘reopening’. As you know, schools have been closed to most pupils since March as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. We have, of course, remained open to vulnerable pupils and key worker children throughout- including school holidays and bank holidays whilst providing high-quality online or hard copy home learning throughout. The government have now stated that schools across England should prepare for pupils to start returning, possibly from June 1st 2020. The government’s announcement means that, with the support of the council and other partners, we must plan to reopen for children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. Schools would also stay open for all children of key workers and children who are classed as vulnerable. The government will base their final decision on infection rates around the country, a final decision that we expect to be announced on or before Wednesday 28th May. This letter will update you on our work towards that goal and our initial response to the likelihood of meeting the targets set out, in a safe and appropriate manner.

First of all, thank you for your responses to the letter titled ‘Response to Government Announcement’ on Tuesday 12th May. The deadline has now passed and we have placed the numbers in each year group alongside the guidelines and our own, thorough risk assessments. The last few months have been incredibly difficult and complex for everyone. We are now faced with an even greater challenge of providing safe and appropriate education to a potentially significant number of pupils. To be clear, our staff want to work and have given school leaders their full and unequivocal support- they are ready to work with and for our families as always. As leaders, it is important to be positive and proactive in doing all that we can to support children to keep on learning and progressing whilst also keeping our families happy with our offer and provision. Naturally, we have to balance this need with the safety and wellbeing of pupils, families and staff. Guidance suggests that the science around Covid-19 indicates primary age pupils are low-risk but some of our staff and their families are not and we want to follow the guidance very carefully to protect everyone who may enter our premises over the coming weeks and months.

We absolutely understand that some parents may be concerned. The government have said they will provide urgent, updated guidance and that each school will be able to manage this process in a way that best suits its needs. Ultimately, schools will make their own decisions on how to start reopening, first for children in the eligible year groups and then in the future for all pupils. Every school is unique and every school will make its own plans, working alongside the council and other partners.

Other parents will feel, naturally, incredibly keen for their children to return to school and get life ‘back to normal.’ We understand this, of course we do. However, the guidance means that we cannot offer pupils their ‘normal’ school experience in the current climate of social distancing. Our plans have been produced around creating the required ‘bubbles’ of pupils and staff. This means that pupils may not be taught by their familiar teacher or teaching assistant or in their familiar classroom. The Government have set a maximum limit of 15 pupils per class. An initial risk assessment on Wednesday 13th May found that only 7 pupils can access one of our classrooms and have a designated space that is 2 metres squared (the constantly referred to ‘safe distance’ by the Government since mid-March) away from other pupils. The maximum number of individual work stations that we can safely have in each classroom, based on a thorough risk assessment that allows adequate access to fire routes is 13. For this reason, we cannot announce our concrete plans just yet as we work with the government guidance and health and safety officials to decide on safe and appropriate capacity figures for each learning space. The school day will be organised completely differently to minimise bubbles mixing and staff will be assigned to only one group for the whole week. Our policies on health and safety will be significantly adapted so that children or staff presenting with symptoms can be isolated and sent home immediately, for example.

Moreover, what 'normal' looks like in the Early Years is significantly impacted by Government guidelines including the removal of many tactile resources, soft furnishings, toys and teddies, etc. We have adapted these spaces and found that the maximum of 15 pupils per room is more manageable, due to the limited number of tables in EYFS settings and the size of the pupils, but only if we have constant and continuous outdoor provision which, of course, is generally weather dependent. Again, this number is yet to be signed off as safe and staff will have natural concerns about encouraging social distancing to groups of children who are 3, 4 and 5 years old.

Next we apply the numbers. In the interests of transparency, here are the number of applications that we have received as the deadline passed at 3pm on Friday.

Nursery: 25 Reception: 23 Year 1: 17 Year 6: 22 Emergency Provision: 20

As you will note, these numbers and the risk assessments above make our next steps very complex. Now we must make some sensible decisions that support everyone to have some access to education/social time for pupils but also to allow parents some flexibility to return to work. Through regular communication with the Local Authority, our cluster of local primary schools and other cluster leads we, like other schools, will appear to only be able to initially offer a staggered extension of the school offer to some year groups in the first instance. As our numbers in the EYFS (Nursery and Reception) are higher than the maximum of 15 we are currently exploring an alternating weekly offer. The only alternative, when applying some of the guidance- which has changed many times in the last week- would be to have Nursery and Reception children spread throughout school at the detriment of offering other key year groups their adapted provision.

Whilst the guidance (shared below) points to this model where EYFS numbers are high, I feel that I am paid and employed to lead our school in the best interests of all pupils. I also feel very lucky that our parents trust and support myself and the leadership team/Governing Body to make decisions in the best interests of their children. As a leader with a clear commitment to wellbeing I do not feel it is appropriate to educate EYFS pupils in unfamiliar environments, with unfamiliar staff and unfamiliar resources, the variety and quality of which are depleted by the guidance stating the removal of most EYFS staple learning activities and materials. This guidance would also mean that Y6 pupils, and potentially Y1 pupils, missed out on an opportunity to return. When the guidance, and the Education Secretary, initially announced the plans with a focus on 'supporting transition' I am incredibly uncomfortable to consider Y6 not having the opportunity to return in some way before they leave us.

You can click on this link to see the full guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>

Please be aware that our emergency provision will continue throughout Spring Bank and in to the new term so any parents who absolutely need support due to vulnerability or critical worker status, will receive this as a priority.

We have taken great strides forward over the last few weeks in terms of adapting policies and environments, PPE, catering, adjusting and staggering timetables/staffing plans and developing and sharing new or existing safety training but there is more work to do. Our first principle is that any expansion of onsite numbers must be safe enough to command the confidence of you, our parents, our teachers and our school leaders/Governors. School leaders make decisions every day about the safety of the children and the school site. This decision is a more complex and difficult one due to the current circumstances. It is taken with care and in the best interests of everyone involved, always. I can assure you that nothing is more important to us than the safety of our children, their families and our staff.

Stay safe everyone and thank you for your continued outstanding support.

Kind Regards

Mr L McClure

Mrs K Thorogood

Headteacher

Chair of Governors