



21st May 2020

Summer Term Phased Return to School

Dear Parents and Carers,

You will be aware of the Government's ambition to begin a phased return to school for pupils in key year groups from 1st June. The instruction for secondary schools from Government is that we should start to consider provision for pupils in Year 10 and 12 only at this stage. The senior leadership team has been engaged in detailed planning to see whether we can currently facilitate the safe return of these pupils so they can start to resume their education in school - initially on a part-time - basis before the Summer.

The Trust Board met last night to consider the Government guidance on phased school return, the current scientific research on Covid-19 transmission with regard to children, and the school's current risk assessment (which has been developed based upon expected pupil numbers returning to school as indicated by parental surveys; the availability of staff and classroom space required to facilitate small group teaching while allowing for social distancing; availability and other key issues around safe school transport; school layout; school catering and the preventative measures which can be fully implemented by the school before 1st June to mitigate the danger and understandable fears around virus transmission).

Following extensive discussion, The Trust Board has concluded that the school cannot safely open for Year 10 and 12 students during the week beginning 1st June. However, it remains our intention to re-open the school for these key year groups before the end of the Summer Term if it can be judged safe to do so. There are no proposals for other year groups to return to school before September in the Government's published plans.

We are currently working towards introducing Year 10 classes in school from the week beginning Monday 15th June and Year 12 classes during the week beginning Monday 13th July. However, these dates will be kept under review by the school and the Trust Board, and will also be subject to any changes in national guidance – the Government has already indicated that they plan to review whether to implement the planned phased re-opening of schools at a meeting on 28th May in the light of the data at that time on the R-rate and scientific advice from SAGE and PHE.

The Trust Board looked carefully at the currently available scientific evidence on virus transmission and also considered the letter published this week by the British Medical Association (the professional body for UK doctors) to the NEU. The letter states, 'until we have got case numbers much lower, we should not consider re-opening schools... We cannot risk a second spike or take actions which would increase the spread of the virus, particularly as we see sustained rates of infection across the UK.' The BMA follow-up statement published yesterday states, 'A zero-risk approach is not possible. This is about 'safe' being an acceptable level of risk.'

The Trust Board was also mindful that the Government has still not published the guidance for secondary schools on safe re-opening. Given that today marks the end of term - and the new term begins on 1st June - the timescale for implementing the guidance (whenever it is published) and training staff on safe working protocols and procedures was judged to be impossible to achieve.

Another key consideration was the availability of school transport. We have been informed that to comply with social distancing, capacity on school buses has to be significantly reduced. Currently it is only judged to be safe by operators for a maximum of 17 pupils to travel on a double-decker bus. There are insufficient buses or drivers available to service additional vehicles on the schools' established routes, so school bus travel will not currently be available to most families before the Summer. We know from our survey that many families are entirely reliant on school buses to bring their child to and from school.



The school continues to remain open - as it has been during term-time and school holidays for the whole lockdown period - for a small group of children (largely the children of key workers). During this time, we continue to work both in-school and remotely, engaging with external health and safety consultants to explore possible virus control measures we can implement now in order to move swiftly to re-open for more children when it is the right time to do so. Measures currently being explored include additional provision for hand-washing and/or hand-sanitising facilities; additional cleaning of key areas throughout the school day; staggered break and lunchtimes and timetable amendments to reduce pupil movement around the school and restricting contact between wider groups of pupils than is absolutely necessary.

On a personal note, nothing would make me happier than to see our pupils return as soon as possible to resume their education in school when it is judged safe to do so. I do not want our pupils' education in school to be delayed a moment longer than is absolutely necessary. However, alongside being a school leader I am the parent of three school-aged children. My highest priority will always be the safety and welfare of children.

I hope we shall shortly see a sustained downward trend in new confirmed cases of Covid-19 both locally and nationally. I also hope there will soon be extensive arrangements for testing and contact tracing so that new cases can be swiftly isolated to reduce virus spread in local communities and that comprehensive access to regular testing for children and staff becomes widely available. These measures would increase my confidence – and that of the Trust Board - that the time was right for pupils to resume school. Hopefully this situation will arrive soon.

I should like to thank all parents for their support of the school and all of our staff as we try to provide the best possible, safe education for your children in these difficult times. You are doing a great job as home educators – a role you never applied for, but which you are fulfilling admirably with the support of the resources we are providing. We shall be delighted to take-over your great work when we can get back into school – you may have struggled with the Maths, the English or the Science, but you will have given your children great confidence in knowing that they are being kept safe and are cared for and loved. Many children will look back on this period when they are adults with genuine affection for the additional time they got to spend with you and the home curriculum you uniquely delivered in these strange times. Your children are incredibly resourceful and adaptable and we shall find a range of ways to help them catch-up with any work which has been missed – they are in the same position as every other child around the world, so please do not worry.

As we all know, the situation with Covid-19 and our understanding of the virus evolves on a daily basis and we shall continue to work with our Trust Board to review our position on re-opening before Summer as new evidence and guidance emerges. Towards this end, we have scheduled a further Trust Board meeting for Monday 8th June. Please take heart from the fact that the current situation is temporary and before too long we shall return to being the happy, welcoming and vibrant school we all know and miss.

Please take care and stay safe and well.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Guest
Headteacher

Yours sincerely,



Sylvia Paddock
Chair of Aspire Schools Trust