

Edward Peake C of E (VC) Middle School

Federation Headteacher: Miss Z J Linington

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21 May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I hope that this letter finds you well. I am sending out this letter to try and give you an update as to where we as a school are with regards to our reopening plan. This is a long letter; I do apologise but there is a lot of information to try to get across so that you are aware of our situation and the work that we are doing as a school. Thank you for your patience in waiting for us to get back to you with further details and for the many of you who responded to our initial survey, including the encouraging comments of support for the school. Your views have helped us to shape our initial plan.

From the outset, let me stress that, if it were safe, we would love nothing more than to have every single Edward Peake pupil and staff member back on site, living, loving and learning together. Until it is safe, we must make extraordinary and courageous choices – our 'bottom line' is that we will not put pupil, staff or family safety in jeopardy.

You will be aware that on 10 May 2020, the Prime Minister outlined the roadmap to recovery from the Coronavirus. The second step, provisionally and conditionally set for 1 June involves a phased re-opening of schools:

"Schools should prepare to begin to open for more children from 1 June. The Government expects children to be able to return to early years settings, and for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to be back in school in smaller sizes, from this point."

The rationale for Year 6 was as follows: *"Year 6 children are finishing Key Stage 2 and are preparing for the transition to secondary school, and will benefit immensely from time with their friends and teachers to ensure they are ready."*

At Edward Peake, we initially wondered whether for middle schools, this may mean that Year 8 might be the first year group to return, however, the guidance went on to say:

"We encourage middle schools to do the same and welcome back children in year 6, to ensure national parity for children in this year group."

Since then, we have been inundated with guidance, checklists and revised guidance. They are all available online. There is a specific document aimed at parents and carers – click on this link: [Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1 June: guidance for parents and carers.](#)

As you can imagine, school leaders have spent the last few days discussing and planning. There has been a torrent of emails and guidance from the government and local authority; much of it contradictory and un-implementable. Just one example is: people should only meet with one member of a different family and, even then, they should do so in the open air. Meanwhile, children and school staff are expected to meet with members of up to fifteen different families and try to stay with them in the same room for six and a half hours.



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As a Headteacher, I have always tried to do what is right for our school community and I will continue to do so to the best of my ability. I have a duty to try to make this work and my senior leadership team are meeting and agonising over what to plan next. I can promise you that in everything, we will do our very best to keep our community safe and that, whatever we decide, will be the best we can do.

After an extensive risk assessment, **we have concluded that it will not be safe enough to have all Year 6 pupils and key worker pupils back on site on 1 June.** We are a large middle school and the Government proposals are clearly designed around the primary school model. We simply cannot put in place the measures as described by the Government at this time. Government guidance states that:

"Any setting that cannot achieve these increases at any point because:

- there are not enough classrooms or spaces available in the setting*
- they do not have enough available teachers or staff to supervise the groups have flexibility but must first focus on continuing to provide places for priority groups (vulnerable children and the children of critical workers)."*

Both of those criteria apply to Edward Peake when we attempt to reduce our group sizes in line with local and national advice and our risk assessments.

We also have concerns around the DfE guidance re: social distancing in the school context:

"Children cannot be expected to remain 2 metres apart from each other and staff. In deciding to bring more children back to schools, DfE suggest that we work through the following hierarchy of measures:

- avoiding contact with anyone with symptoms*
- frequent hand cleaning and good respiratory hygiene practices*
- regular cleaning of settings*
- minimising contact and mixing"*

It has been a challenge to enforce social distancing with the key worker children in school over the last few weeks and to suddenly scale this up to a whole year group would be unworkable. Given the potential numbers involved (139 pupils in Year 6), we believe that we will find it difficult to minimise contact and mixing and that the transmission possibilities will be increased. This will be too much of a risk to children and staff.

We also appreciate that we need to support families and parents to get back to work and in the spirit of the original advice, we will actively look to increase the number of pupils in school – especially for families struggling with accessing technology. We are currently exploring different ways in which we can accommodate more pupils on site, whilst not compromising safety. **With regard to the week commencing 1 June, we plan to continue our key worker support programme albeit in a slightly different format.** We may then expand to accommodate some more pupils the following week (8 June) if there is space, staffing and the demand to do so.



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This will not be 'normal' school and plans will include key changes:

- Limiting class sizes to no more than 12 pupils (as we cannot fit more than 12 into our classrooms whilst adhering to social distancing rules), assigned one or two adults who remain with their group all day
- Many children will not be with their form tutor or in their familiar classroom but will still be in contact with their teachers through Google Classroom
- Changing the timing of the school day to avoid a long lunchtime and having an earlier finish time
- Staggering start and finish times, break times & lunchtimes,
- Changes to what is taught and how it is taught
- Increased cleaning regimes
- Strict social distancing - within classrooms and even at play and lunch times

Distance learning for those year groups not in school will continue as it does now, and we have deliberately planned for teachers to be given time to facilitate this.

Depending on how the situation unfolds, we are hoping to organise some sort of 'transition' work, both for our Year 8 pupils going on to Upper School and to enable us to begin to welcome our new Year 4 pupils.

We will send out further details of future provision as soon as they are available.

I hope that you will see that we have planned with safety and protection, for all, at the centre of our thinking. I know that there is no plan that will suit everyone. Some of you will be relieved by the contents of this letter and some disappointed - we do recognise that. Please do telephone us at the school if you feel that we can support you further.

Yours sincerely

Z J Linington
Federation Headteacher

