



Monday 01st June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

As you will appreciate, preparations for the wider opening of schools has taken quite some time in order to consult, plan and prepare and our staff have been working hard to ensure school is as safe as possible.

Each of our schools will be operating within its own unique circumstances in relation to the needs of families, available staff and the constraints of the school buildings. With this in mind, we have decided what is best for our schools, the priority being the safety of all our pupils and staff.

As a Trust we are very proud to have kept all our 26 schools open for the children of Key Workers and vulnerable children throughout the lockdown period.

I am acutely aware that nothing can compare to coming into school and learning in a classroom setting. We are eager to begin bringing our children back as soon as it is safe to do so.

As a Trust we are constantly reviewing this situation and we have not set out that any particular age group will not return in advance of the summer holidays. Given the considerations set out below we have determined that nursery and reception will not be included in the first intake of pupils as part of the first intake of "wider opening".

As you are aware, many local authorities have set out a blanket "no opening" message whilst many Trusts and local authorities have adopted a phased and staggered approach, indeed many have followed the same phasing plan of NPCAT.

Listening carefully to the concerns of our parents and staff, accounting for medical advice and trade union input and after taking into account the initial findings of our own comprehensive risk assessment, we have decided to begin planning for a staged approach to reopening our schools.

In common with many teachers and educationalists, we had concerns about bringing the very youngest age groups back at this point in the light of the requirements for:

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- social distancing;
- emotional challenges of bringing young children into such a restrictive environment;
- the nature of the learning environment i.e. without soft play equipment or seating;
- hygiene requirements / considerations for children and staff;
- spacing requirements in playgrounds and corridors.

For these reasons, our nursery and reception children will not be returning at this time. However, as set out in previous correspondence, these arrangements could be reviewed over the course of the term.

We will commence our phased, staggered “wider opening” on June 8 with Year 6 joining the children of Key Workers. Year 1 pupils will have the opportunity to join them on June 15.

It is also essential to stress the desire to meet the need for phased return of children and ensure their health and wellbeing.

I do accept the challenges faced by parents at this time and the decisions set out are not taken lightly. Our current plans account for a safe and staggered approach thus ensuring stability and safety for pupils, staff and families at this most challenging of times. We will monitor and review our measures and notify you of any increased provision.

Please see attached the table for “wider opening” and guidance on Key Worker criteria.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Hegarty

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