



Dear Parents/Carers

Friday 5<sup>th</sup> June 2020

## Principals update

Welcome back to Summer Term 2! I hope that you enjoyed the break. I know that our staff benefitted and are now back and refreshed for the last push of the academic year. We expect it to be just as busy as every year as we prepare for transitions and write up our end of year reports, which you will receive at the end of term. We will be especially sad to see our leavers go this year, without being able to give them the usual send off at the Leavers Ball. However, we have other plans to celebrate their achievements and time with us... watch this space for more details!

## Wider school opening – in mainstream schools

As we expected, there has been lots of new and updated government guidance over half term and during the weekend relating to the wider opening of schools across the country. Lots of bedtime reading for me! However, much of this is related to mainstream schools and the reopening of Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. As you may have gathered, there has been a lot of scientific speculation and media attention with regards to the timing of this and whether it is still too early to lift this safety measure as the country is still at Alert Level 4.

## Wider school opening – in special schools

Special schools have received different guidance to reflect that all pupils have been 'eligible' for school provision, should they need it, throughout the lockdown, no matter what the year group. To maintain this continued flexibility, special schools are expected to gradually increase their numbers of pupils coming back to school, across the age range.

## Key considerations that we are taking into account:

1. **Steadily increasing numbers of 'vulnerable' pupils** – this is a tough time for many families, and as the situation extends, the pressure for respite grows. In addition to the wider opening of school, we will also bear in mind the increasing number of pupils who require support. We have limited capacity and want to be able to support those who need it most. This week we will have supported 67 pupils, with this number increasing by another 17 pupils next week. We have adjusted staff rotas to increase staffing capacity, and increased numbers of pupils sharing a classroom (where appropriate and safe) to accommodate this rising demand.
2. **Increasing pupil numbers means increasing staff numbers = increasing the total number of people on-site to manage social distancing** – We currently have 75 staff available to work on-site. This is manageable as we have put protective measures in place, managed staff numbers on site, and enabled them to be proactive, competent, and confident in managing new systems and processes. Our staff are crucial to keeping school safe so we respect that it takes time to build up pupil numbers gradually.

3. **The potential for additional risks posed to those with Learning Difficulties** – BBC News article, Coronavirus: Pandemic sees spike in learning disabled deaths (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/disability-52891401>). There are many unknown aspects to this virus. Information from a range of sources informs our practical and cautious approach.
4. **Availability of specifically trained/ appropriate staff** – We need to ensure specific staff are available, secure and confident in specific pupil needs such as feeding, medications, manual handling, and restrictive interventions to enable pupils to return safely. There are refresher/ training needs due to the prolonged lockdown.
5. **Consistency** – Things work for our children/ young people with SEND when there is shared understanding and a consistent approach. Moving across from distance learning/support to on-site education in a phased/blended way will not be easy for many of our pupils. Careful thought is being given to plan for this eventual switch over for different groups/ individuals.

#### **Tell us what you think about wider school opening**

- Please use this link to complete our 3-minute parent questionnaire by 12pm next Monday (8<sup>th</sup> June 2020) <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Severndale>

These results will give us a clearer understanding of your COVID family circumstances regarding clinical vulnerability, confidence levels about the wider opening of school, and the demand for certain groups/ individuals to return to school. We need your help to inform our next steps for June/July and for September.

#### **Severndale plans for wider opening**

We appreciate that any changes will require careful planning for you, as well as for us at school. Therefore, we hope to give you an indication of our plan next week, with further details and updates to follow as we learn more as the COVID-19 situation progresses.

Thank you for your continued support and feedback that I am receiving directly, and via academy staff. This is also helping to guide and inform us to understand what is working, and what we can further improve on.

Please let me, or a member of staff, know if you would like to discuss anything further.

Best wishes,



**Sabrina Hobbs**  
**Principal**