



St Matthew's Bloxam C of E Primary School

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"Let Your Light Shine"

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Dear Parents,

Please be prepared it's a long letter!

Since I last wrote to you on Monday 11th May there have been a number of updates on the Government website. They are not easy to find as they have been uploaded to the 'Education, training and skills' section of the site rather than the 'Coronavirus' section.

There is a section for parents and carers. I have linked a copy of the new document on their 'Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from the 1st June: guidance for parents and carers'. There are a number of links within this document to other guidance and information so you may prefer to read it online. At the bottom of this letter, I have included links to online documents.

I will try to summarise the current position and guidance as I understand it:

Overview of the expectations on school

- If the 5 key tests set by the government justify change then the government plans to move to Step 2 of their adjustment plan, not before the 1st June. At this step, the government plans to include the phased reopening of primary schools for the education of children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6.
- Schools are asked to continue to provide childcare provision for priority groups (vulnerable children and children of critical workers).
- It will not be compulsory for children to attend.
- Children who are considered extremely clinically vulnerable and shielding should not attend. Parents of children who have a health condition that makes them vulnerable and is at higher risk of severe illness from Coronavirus should seek and follow medical advice.

Managing risk and rate of transmission

- Settings are asked to reduce contact between children and staff as far as possible by children being grouped into small bubbles and keeping that bubble away from any other bubble.
- Year groups will be split into smaller bubbles of no more than 15.
- We are advised that bubbles should not be mixed. Children should be in the same small bubble at all times of each day and different bubbles should not be mixed.
- Allocate the same staff to a bubble and as far as possible these staff should remain the same throughout the day and on all days that the bubble attend.
- Ensure children use the same classroom or area throughout the day. Schools are asked to consider seating children at the same desk each day they attend.
- Thorough cleaning is crucial as always but during this time particularly in the following ways:
 1. In between group use of any shared space e.g. between sittings in the dining room if that is used or between groups attending school.
 2. Frequent cleaning of surfaces that children touch more regularly e.g. toys, books, desks, chairs, doors, etc.

- Continue to ensure frequent and quality hand washing.
- Ventilate rooms as much as possible.
- Consider one-way circulation around the building or divide corridors to keep groups apart.
- Stagger breaks and lunchtimes.
- Use outdoor space as much as possible for exercise, breaks, and learning.
- Outdoor equipment should not be used unless it is appropriately cleaned between groups. Wherever possible equipment or toys which are not required should be removed and stored away.
- Limit sharing of resources, stationery, and home-school items.

Curriculum & school day organisation

- Consider pupils' mental health and wellbeing and support pupils so they are ready to learn.
- Schools should also, at the same time, do their best to support pupils remaining at home continuing with a home learning offer.
- Schools are asked to provide meals for all children in school and these should be free of charge where pupils meet the free school meal eligibility criteria.

Next Steps

There have been a number of documents released, these are also attached at the bottom of this letter. Updates have been frequent and will continue I am sure.

I am in the process of completing a risk assessment considering updates, advice, and problem-solving teamwork across local schools. I aim to have this completed and ready by Friday 22nd May.

My understanding of the guidance is that I must prioritise attendance in the following order:

Provide places for priority groups (childcare for vulnerable children and children of **critical** workers)

Nursery

Reception

Year 1

Year 6

Therefore, I am asking for your help in the following ways:

- Please do not make plans based on the dates given by the government. These are aspirational and are heavily dependent on the specific challenges that each school faces as well as the scientific evidence stacking up.
- Give us the time we need to devise a plan based on guidance that is constantly changing.
- Do not see a place in school as an 'entitlement' for your child, even if you are a key worker, or have children in the year groups listed. The final decision rests with the Headteacher's in individual schools.
- Please support the decisions that we make, even if they negatively affect your own arrangements.
- **Parents with children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 please complete another survey which will be sent to you this week so we can gauge which children will be returning and put them into bubbles of children with allocated staff. Please complete one for each child if you have more than one child in those returning year groups.**

There is not a single solution to these issues. The guidance is contradictory and each school must find its own path based on the building they are in and the staff available. I want to maintain and protect the excellent relationships we have with our families, so I will be fair, open and transparent at every stage.

I have spoken to many parents over recent days and I want to say a huge thank you for your patience, support and confidence in the SMB Team as we work out how we move forward. You have shared your worries and questions and understood that for the majority of these I only know the same amount of information as everyone else.

Revisiting questions asked by parents since Monday

When will we know if 'Step 2' is going ahead on the 1st June?

This was an interesting question. All the statements and guidance talk about Step 2 only being applied if the 5 government measures are met. I haven't yet been able to find a definitive answer to this question. I will keep asking and reading the information provided. I am not sure if the government has announced the next review date. If it is 3 weeks after the last one it will be at the end of May.

Is it definite? Are schools starting to reopen from the 1st June?

No. This is part of the government's Step 2 and they have made it clear that it will not be before the 1st of June and is dependent on continued positive progress towards the 5 measures. The more we can stay home, stay safe and minimise our risk of spreading the virus the more likely we are to be able to open in June.

Will I have to send my child to school if I am concerned about their safety?

No. The government uses the phrase 'we strongly encourage' when talking about attendance but have been clear that there will be no fines for non-attendance. As far as I am concerned this will be your choice as to whether you send your child. We will respect that.

I have a household member with a significant health concern do I have to send my child in?

There is very clear guidance on this in the parent guidance. The answer seems to depend on if the household member is 'extremely clinically vulnerable' in which case only if stringent social distancing can be adhered to.

Will the children be all together in their normal class?

No group sizes are not allowed to be more than 15 and will vary by the classroom size being used and therefore will not necessarily be able to be with their friends or class teacher.

Will they be split over a number of classes?

Yes, children will be split into two bubbles for each year group.

If split into smaller groups who will teach them?

Teachers or teaching assistants under the direction of teachers. It will depend on staff availability. Some staff will not be able to return to work yet due to the fact that they are shielding, self-isolation, or displaying symptoms.

Will the kitchen be open to serve dinners?

Yes. However this will be a choice of a packed lunch or jacket potato which will be delivered to classrooms and eaten in the classroom.

How will you keep 2m between reception and year 1 children when playing?

As you will understand this will be impossible to enforce especially with our youngest children.

How will we safely drop off and pick up children in each year group?

Each group will have their own entrance/exit door. A trickle in start with doors open from 8.30 and closed at 8.50 for the start of the day and a staggered home time.

Will the breakfast club and after school club be reopened when schools begin their phased reopening?

I have given this a lot of thought and the biggest challenge to being able to do this is keeping all the children who attend separated by bubbles and in separate spaces as they are cross-class and cross and year group. Therefore it is not deemed safe to open this provision at this time.

Is it worth doing all this planning if we aren't sure it will happen?

Yes. At some point (hopefully sooner rather than later if medical science supports the decision) we will begin our phased reopening. I see the work being put into planning, preparation and problem solving as a positive step towards a safe, informed and well-resourced return when we are allowed to.

Will the staff and children have to wear PPE?

The only time adults will definitely wear PPE is whilst supervising a child waiting to be collected if they are displaying symptoms associated with coronavirus. We have plastic gloves and aprons for staff and they are welcome to wear these now in childcare and when we reopen to education. Up to this date, we have not provided face masks but are considering this as part of our risk assessment and particularly for staff supervising pupils with symptoms waiting to be collected. If a pupil or staff member feels more comfortable wearing a face-covering then that is fine. The link at the bottom of this letter entitled - Coronavirus: implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings contain more information. If you wish to send your child to school with a face mask, that is your decision, but they must be confident on putting it on and taking it off as staff will not be able to do this for them.

What do you think about reopening to these year groups?

I want our school to reopen. I want our children to be able to return to their classroom, their friends and their education. I want you to be able to return to work. I want to lift the trauma of home education for you. **BUT** only when it is **SAFE** to do so.

I want to believe that the government has only made this proposal for step 2 because the science tells them it is right, although I am left concerned by a report that the Chief Scientific Adviser for the DFE has not assessed the school reopening guidance. Hopefully, this will be done quickly and any updates provided to schools.

I think it is going to be a stressful and anxious time for staff, parents and pupils as we all learn to work, play and interact in this new way. I cannot guarantee that any child will stay 2m away from another, I cannot guarantee they will be in a bubble with their friends, I cannot guarantee they will be in their own classroom, I cannot guarantee they will be taught by a familiar adult.

Thank you so much for all your questions and please keep them coming in. You can email them to admin3213@welearn365.com

As you can appreciate this is a huge undertaking for us as a school but we are also aware of the concerns that our parents have of returning their children to school at this time. Whilst we will make every effort to make it as safe as we can, the conditions we are required to meet to do so will be very difficult to implement, practically on a day by day basis.

Thank you to the parents of the children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 who have completed the survey. There will be another one (see details above) to gauge which children will be returning to school so that I may create the bubbles of children and staff who will work together in the same room. Please ensure you return this in good time so we can make plans going forward.

Siblings in classes other than those specified will not be allowed back into school until the time of their phased return.

For Year 6 children, I would like to again reassure you that, we will be aiming to provide some lovely activities to celebrate the end of their journey with us, even though they will be socially distanced.

Links:

[Parents and Carers information](#)

[Actions for educational and childcare settings to prepare for wider opening from 1 June 2020](#)

[Coronavirus: guidance for schools](#)

[Coronavirus: implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings](#)

I would also like to place on record huge 'THANKS' for the AMAZING job my staff has done in responding to this pandemic and the unprecedented times and conditions they have had to work in. Without choice, they have had to work putting themselves and their families at risk.

They have fully supported me in the difficult decisions I have had to make and are a credit to the school and education profession. 'THANK YOU', TEAM SMB.

Stay safe, stay alert and take care.

Kind regards,

Anita Timson

Headteacher

