

Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

Dear Parents, Guardians, Carers, Children and Young People,

I promised that I would write to you again before the half-term break to give you an update on the guidance for the phased extended of our schools, our 'opening up' plans and our risk assessment processes.

I wanted to start by thanking you for your continued support for your schools and for your engagement in the surveys and questions that your schools have been sending out over the last week or so. Your responses have really helped us in our planning for the next steps of our phased return to school. We are extremely grateful for your help, and for your honest responses. Thank you.

The staff and leaders in our schools and across the Trust have been working tirelessly this week to risk assess the school buildings and environments in order to develop the first phase of our proposed extended opening of the schools. You will be aware from my previous letters that in order for us to consider the possibility of opening our schools to more pupils we must satisfy the key criteria in our '**Safety and Capacity First**' model:

- We need to be clear that the Government and Scientific guidance gives the go ahead for schools to plan to re-open from 1<sup>st</sup> June onwards;
- We need to be assured that we have identified and done all that we can to reduce the risks to everyone who will be in our schools;
- We need to ensure that we have the right resources and equipment, including PPE as guided, in place;
- We need to be really clear of the capacity of our schools, and the number of staff available to enable us to open;
- We need to be ready and prepared for opening by reorganising learning spaces to ensure as much social distancing as is possible is ensured;
- We need to ensure that everyone coming into school are reassured that it is as safe as possible to do so.

I am sure that you will have seen the ongoing debate in the media this week and the conflicting opinions about how and when schools should be opening to more pupils. We have followed the guidance and our risk assessment of our schools has demonstrated some very clear themes across all of our schools:

- Not all of our staff are able to return to school for clinical, personal, and for childcare reasons;
- In line with Government advice we have made our best endeavours to bring pupils identified in the updated vulnerable groups, and the children of keyworkers back into school before the half-term break. This has significantly increased the number of pupils in school already;
- In general, our classrooms and our learning spaces are big enough for 10 – 12 pupils in the social distancing and 'bubble' models;
- The design of many of our schools means that accessing toilets for staff and pupils is difficult with larger numbers in the buildings;
- Each school's context is unique and individual, and so the extended opening plan must reflect what is possible for that individual school, staff and site.

In each case our schools have worked from their risk assessments and capacity assessments to identify a key number of pupils and staff who we believe it would be safe to bring into school when we are advised that they may return; and a proposed phased plan for how this could be expanded over time and as the scientific and medical advice guides us. We, along with our Trust Directors have continued to take note of the Local Authority advice and guidance to ensure that the final decision whether or not to extend the opening, which rests with the Directors, is one clearly based on the context of each school.

Your school will be writing to you to advise which pupil groups it has identified **may** be able to return in this first stage of our plans. We need to be clear that it won't be all of the children identified in the Government's plan at this stage because we don't have the space, staff or capacity to do that under the current requirements, much as we really want to. Instead we will be bringing identified groups first, reviewing, assessing the risk, and looking to expand that offer when it is possible and safe to do so. We will be taking our time so that we can ensure **safety and capacity first** before we make any further changes.

I also need to point out that we still do not have any clear guidance as to **when** we will be starting our phased extended opening, and we continue to be advised that we may not know this fully until **28<sup>th</sup> or 29<sup>th</sup> May**. The guidance may remain the same, or the guidance may be changed – at this stage we don't know and so we're preparing our plans for what we expect to happen. This does mean that we will not be able to confirm our proposed opening plans with you until Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June. It is for this reason that we have delayed our proposed extended opening until Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> June so that we can ensure that there is some warning for you as to when some of the children may be returning to school. I know that this is frustrating – it is very much for us too – we don't want to give any false hope or make any promises that we will have to undo because of the change of guidance. Opening in this way will ensure that we are prepared and ready to welcome those children who are able to come back into school.

And school will look different, so we're going to take some time in those first few days back to take photos and videos, to post pictures of what our schools look like, the staff who will be there and particularly the learning environments so that you and your children can see what school looks like. We'll also give you an update on what the home-learning will start to look like as we adapt and change our approaches towards groups being both in school and at home.

We will continue to keep you informed of our progress, and of any changes as we develop our approaches and learn more about the ways that we can work under these 'new times'. As I said in my previous letter I hope that I have been able to offer some reassurance that we are working hard to be able to start the process of a phased reopening of our schools, and that we will only do so when we are sure that it is safe and practical to do so. Until then we will continue to operate as we are doing at the moment and there will no change to our approach. Your safety and that of our staff is absolutely paramount.

I will be in touch after the half-term break to update you on the guidance, and our next steps.

Take good care, and stay safe and well.

With kind regards,

*Jez Piper*

CEO