



14th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

On Sunday evening the Prime Minister announced his ambition to re-open primary schools with a phased approach, no earlier than the 1st June starting with Reception, Year 1 and Year 6.

On Monday evening the DfE issued guidance on how they expect schools to do this. This guidance included the opening of nursery settings too which impacts on Walton Oak, Riverbridge and Darley Dene.

In addition, the guidance about the children of Critical Workers has also changed somewhat. The guidance issued in March made it clear that whilst places could be offered to children of Critical Workers, there was an emphasis on those children staying at home if they could be cared for safely. The DfE are now indicating that all children of Critical Workers - even if they can be cared for safely at home - could possibly attend school if the school could accommodate them safely.

The guidance makes it clear that it is the school leaders' responsibility to risk assess their settings and then determine the degree to which the school can open to these additional children - or not. The outcome of their risk assessments will vary from school to school, with some schools possibly being able to open to all four year groups mentioned, and some possibly not opening at all. It depends entirely on the context of the setting, the physical attributes of the buildings and the staffing capacity.

These are some of the points the guidance tells us to consider:

- Children can only attend in small groups with the same adult. The group size is determined by the number of children that the space can accommodate, taking account of social distancing measures. In some of our classrooms that is likely to be only 7 or 8 at the most. In others it will be more.
- These groups must stay the same with the same adult. Obviously, this means not all the children will be working with 'their' teacher - it may be another teacher or a TA. This point will be further impacted by the fact that not all staff will be returning to school as a result of their own health issues and personal circumstances.
- These groups must stay away from other groups in the school
- All soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are "hard to clean" must be removed.
- All equipment and surfaces - including pens, pencils, books and other stationery - must be disinfected before another group of children can use them
- We have been asked to "try to prevent the sharing of equipment"
- Drop off and pick up times must be staggered and parents will not be able to come into the school building
- Where possible, classrooms must be accessed from their own external doors to avoid unnecessary moving through other parts of the school.
- Children are encouraged to avoid public transport as their means of getting to and from school
- Whilst masks are being encouraged in other workplaces, the DfE have stated "*majority of staff in education settings will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work, even if they are not always able to maintain a distance of 2 metres from others*"
- We need to keep ensuring children wash their hands often, for at least 20 seconds

Consequently, these points need to be borne in mind if your child is invited to return to school:

- They may not have their class teacher
- They may not be in their own classroom

- They will not be attending every day - at most 2 or 3 consecutive days per week (depending on the school)
- If they have a school meal - the offer will be significantly reduced

What is very clear is that this will not be school as we know it.

In addition, the learning offer as it stands in each school is likely to be reduced.

The guidance does, however, say that parents will not be fined if they decide not to send their children to school.

These announcements have caused widespread concern among parents and school staff alike. Whilst much is made by the Government that children don't typically suffer from COVID-19, what is not emphasised quite so much is the degree to which they transmit it - between themselves and then to adults they are in contact with. The guidance's heavy emphasis on reducing contact and disinfecting is presumably an attempt to address this issue.

There are many parents and school staff who are understandably extremely anxious. All of the teaching unions, one with the support of the British Medical Association, have raised grave concerns about this plan and challenged the Government to produce the science they claim assures our children and staff's safety. It has yet to be seen.

Following extensive discussion with our Headteachers and Leadership Teams, **we have taken the decision to open from the 1st June to Year 6 children only - subject to final confirmation from the Government that this proposal is to be actioned. At the moment this is still only a proposal and the Government may still decide to withdraw it.** We will keep the situation under review and if possible will work to opening to another year group in due course. We may also invite other small groups of children in from other year groups to carry out targeted learning support.

I will take this opportunity to outline our next steps about the possible re-opening of our schools:

- A letter to all parents to identify those children of Critical Workers who may want to attend - ***PLEASE NOTE - this attendance will be from 1st June. Numbers of Critical Worker children will be capped and all 5 schools will be closed at half term. Further information about this will be coming from your school in the next day or so.***
- A poll to Year 6 will be sent to parents to gauge whether or not they will be sending their children to school based on the information they have so far. Please note, the invitation will not be able to share the detail e.g. which adult will be working with them or which children they will be working with
- Headteachers and their Senior Leadership Teams will be in contact with their staff teams to identify particular issues and/or concerns in order to support the risk assessments
- HR advice will be sought
- Further risk assessments will be carried out in each school based on all the information gathered, supported by further advice from the Local Authority and decisions made about wider opening.

Parents will be kept informed as decisions are made.

Please be assured of our absolute commitment to do all we can to keep our children and staff healthy and safe, whilst also doing our best to support the Government's ambition to reopen our schools.

Yours faithfully



Mary Ellen McCarthy
Executive Principal, Lumen Learning Trust