

Dear parents and carers,

This email has two really important and separate parts. Firstly, I would like to outline the current position in relation to school re-opening and clarify (as far as possible) what we actually know about schools returning.

The second part relates particularly to the ongoing education of children who are not currently in school.

School Re-opening

The government have now announced that primary schools will not be expected to welcome back all pupils before the summer holidays, after previously saying they would like this to happen. However, they have said that schools that have the capacity to take in more pupils are encouraged to do so.

Our school has met the government's expectation of re-opening for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 children alongside children of Key Workers from all year groups. We have 6 'bubbles' for these groups and they are all full to capacity. Some of our staff are shielding/clinically vulnerable, so under current guidance, they cannot work in school. All the staff that can work in a bubble are already doing so, unfortunately therefore, we are not able to open up any more bubbles – we just don't have the staff to do this.

Under current guidance, we are also unable to add any more children to the bubbles we have. I know that some parents of children in Reception and Year 1 might now want their child to return to school and I am really sorry that we are unable to accommodate this. We had to set the bubbles based on the numbers of children who were definitely returning on 8 June, and we can't now change this.

Of course, if the social distancing rules or other guidance for schools changes, or if clinically vulnerable staff are allowed to return, we will re-evaluate our position and may be able to have more children back in school.

In terms of what school will look like in September, the answer is that we do not yet know. Schools have been given no guidance on this and we currently have no basis on which to plan. I do not know when schools will be given this information. Our dearest wish is that we will be able to have all our children back in school – but we will have to follow guidance, whatever that is.

Ongoing Education

Over the last few days you may have heard the Prime Minister refer to summer schools, catch up programmes, individual catch up plans for each child, and I know that various parts of the media have spoken about after school classes as well. Schools have been given no information about the detail of any of these initiatives. I read on the BBC website this morning of the '£1 billion catch-up tutoring fund', which of course is a welcome initiative. I will await further information on how this will be implemented.

There is a real danger in thinking that 'catching up' is something that can be done in a couple of hours over the summer or after school. This isn't a situation where one child has missed a couple of weeks of school whilst all their classmates continued with their learning. The education of every single child has been interrupted, at the same time and for a significant length of time. We shouldn't think of our children having to catch up to other children because they are all in the same position – they have all missed the same things. We really also mustn't expect that our children will be able to catch up a term and a half's learning by Christmas, Easter, or even next Summer. We all know that children don't learn twice as much just because we give them twice as much to learn! We have to be realistic about what is possible, and I really do not want you to worry too much about this.

I know that this continues to be a very challenging time for parents, especially of children in Years 2,3,4 and 5 who were not given the option of sending their children back to school. You have been asked to do an almost impossible job of educating your own children, with no training, equipment and often in mixed age groups, often with limited laptops/broadband and when trying to work or manage toddlers and babies (and teenagers!) as well. I truly have the greatest admiration for what you are doing to support your children's learning, in whatever way you have been able to, and over such a long time. I have never had to do what you are doing, but I am pretty sure that, even being a teacher, my home schooling would have been hit and miss.

We are doing our very best to support you by giving a range of resources for you to use with your children, however, I understand how difficult it can be to use these. Some parents have welcomed the structured lessons and suggested timetable, and some parents feel that this is too difficult to achieve in the time and is adding to the pressure of home educating. All of this is completely valid feedback. In order to address this, we are also posting on the website two options you can follow; the less structured learning projects and the more structured timetable. You can choose activities from one or the other or do a mixture of both. The timetable isn't something to aim for, it is something you can use if it helps, or ignore if it doesn't. There is no expectation that you must do all the lessons on the timetable, but they are there if you (and your child) want to use them. Please remember, there is no right or wrong way to do this. We don't expect children to be at any particular standard when they return and it is our job to pick up in school from where we left off, and from where the children are when they return – wherever that is.

We are currently planning for the first part of the Autumn term and how we get children back into the habit of being in school again. We will be focusing on meeting the social and emotional needs of the children and re-establishing their 'school skills'. In order that we can plan in the most effective way, we will be sending out a questionnaire for parents next week so you can give us information on how your child has coped with life in lockdown and with home schooling. This will be an important way of your child's new teacher learning about how to best meet their needs as individuals and as a class.

Life is hard right now. But it is getting better and it will continue to get better. Hope, courage and friendship will carry us through.

" ' Sometimes,' said the horse. 'Sometimes what?' asked the boy. 'Sometimes just getting up and carrying on is brave and magnificent.' "

(taken from 'The Boy, the Mole, the Fox and the Horse', Charlie Mackesy).

With best wishes, and thanks for all you are doing,

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