

Monday 18th May 2020

Proposed re-opening of school to a wider number of pupils from June 1st

Dear Parents/Carers,

You are no doubt aware of the Prime Minister's announcement about the wider opening of schools to more pupils from June 1st and the media coverage regarding concerns for the safety of children, staff and families.

I have waited for a clearer picture to emerge – but as that hasn't really happened yet, feel that I need to keep you informed about how we are dealing with the proposals in school and try to put you in the picture with our early understanding of what this will mean for families and the wider school community.

School will NOT open to wider numbers of pupils until it is SAFE to do so

Firstly, given some of the negative press coverage on this issue, I would like to remind you that school has never been closed! We have been open every day since the lockdown started (except for bank holidays) and all our staff have been working, both in school on a rota basis and/or at home, to continue the education of all children – both groups of key worker and vulnerable children in school, and the remainder of children through providing home learning.

The difference the government's proposals would cause, is that we would be moving from safe working with small, socially distanced groups of around 20 pupils in school in total, to suddenly admitting up to ten times that number. That requires very significant changes to the ways school will need to operate, in order to protect the safety of the children, staff, parents/carers and their extended families.

Safety for key groups

The government and some headteachers have given guarantees over pupil safety – I will not be making the same assurance! What I can assure you is that as a school we will consider every aspect of opening to a wider number of pupils and how this can be managed safely. I will be working within Leeds authority's Health & Safety guidelines and risk assessments, jointly with union representatives on the staff and following the government's non-statutory guidance document to help plan for a phased, gradual, safe increase in pupil numbers.

- **Pupil safety** – the government's strategy seems to be based on the evidence that very few children become seriously ill with the virus. Whilst this is factually correct, it does something that can be guaranteed (eg I am aware of a child currently in a Leeds hospital with the very rare, 'Kawasaki syndrome' of the virus).
- **Safety of parents/carers** – even if we take all the safety measures advised to socially distance parents/carers, the big unknown is the extent to which children act as carriers of the virus and pass it on to their families at home.
- **Safety of the wider community** – my biggest concern is one that the media coverage has so far ignored – the threat of passing on the virus to elderly members of the community (like grandparents). Given that a) children can seemingly carry the virus with few or no symptoms b) we know that the Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic (BAME) people are at a higher risk of death than their white peers and c) many of our families will be in close contact (even sharing the same house) with vulnerable or elderly relatives, this is a concern that we all need to consider with great care.

It will be school – but not as we know it

We all want to see the children settling back in to school and making up for lost time in their social lives with friends, re-establishing school routines and catching up on missed learning.

However, the guidance for wider opening is very clear that school has to set up 'bubbles', within which children have to be strictly managed. Children who are in the year groups set to return, will be in a class group of around 10 pupils. They are unlikely to have their usual teacher – but will remain with the same teacher (and/or support staff) all the time. They will stay within one room (including to eat a packed lunch which will be delivered to them) at an allocated desk with their own equipment. They will have staggered break-times outside, in their own part of the playground - they cannot mix with other class 'bubbles'. They will have a huge focus on new behaviour policy rules around health, hygiene and public safety. T

All this will feel very different to what they are used to or may be expecting! This will be particularly challenging for the youngest pupils returning.

1st June – an aspiration NOT a deadline

June 1st is merely the earliest date that we can consider bringing more children into school. Even if all the safety measures are planned and in place by then, the government will not let schools know whether its 'five tests' have been met and we can open to more pupils, until 28th May.

In practice, Leeds local authority have advised that we proceed in a cautious, measured way – just bringing back one year group at a time once the conditions are met, letting those children (and pupil numbers) settle and checking they are working safely, before expanding to take in another year group. School will follow this sound advice.

Nursery children will not be able to attend

Unfortunately, we will not be able to re-open for nursery pupils. This is due to:

- Staffing – a number of our experienced nursery staff required to lead the setting, are classed as 'clinically vulnerable' and are not able to work in school. I do not think it is appropriate, safe or fair to the children, to use unfamiliar teachers or supply staff to cover
- Because we run split-day options, we would have to deep clean the nursery during the 45min lunch break between sessions, to make the area safe for the option 2 children and parents attending in the afternoon. This will not be possible in such a way as to meet the safety guidelines
- We will need to use the nursery space for spreading out the Reception pupils (who, as they are of statutory school age, are the priority – Nursery was added as an 'aspiration' after the initial announcement by government).

Reception, Year 1 and Year 6

These three year groups were the ones the Prime Minister mentioned in his announcement, with the younger children being regarded as the priority. Therefore, we would look to open up to **Reception first**. Only once we have a clear picture of pupil numbers and how many classrooms and staff they need, will we look at bringing in another year group – Year 6. We would do the same thing again to ensure that we have capacity before opening up to Year 1.

Key/Critical Workers' and Vulnerable Children continue to attend

School will continue to be open for all the children currently attending. In fact, the number of children in these groups may rise, as key workers such as school staff may need full-time places for their children when they are called back to work. [Note that the definition of key workers has not changed – if you were a key worker and were offered a place at school that you didn't take, but may now need as you are required to go back to work, please contact us to discuss your situation.] We will also be contacting families of our children classed as vulnerable, with a view to re-looking at whether more of them need to attend.

These groups will also need to form class 'bubbles' – each with a dedicated room and teacher. You can see that if we have the majority of Reception and Year 6 pupils return, in addition to the key worker/vulnerable groups, that we quickly reach full capacity in terms of classrooms and staffing.

Parents/Carers will need to make their own risk assessments

Whether you send your Rec, Y6 or Y1 child back to school will be your decision. Schools will not be fining families for non-attendance. We will not force any family to send a child back to school if your own circumstances would put anyone in your household at risk.

I know that this will give many of you a lot to think about!

In sharing this information, my hope is that you have a clearer picture of what you as parents/carers will need to consider when making the difficult decision about sending your children in the selected year groups, back into school.

Please could I ask all parents/carers of children in Reception and Year 6 to email school using info@pudseyboltonroyd.org by the end of Wednesday this week, to say whether you would or would not like to take up a place in school for your child when we re-open. We will telephone parents/carers that we don't hear from by the end of the week. This will give you the opportunity to ask any questions of us and we'll try our best to help you, given the information that we have at the time.

I'll continue to keep you updated on this matter.

Wishing you well at this challenging time. Stay safe!

Mr K Buck

Headteacher