

25th June 2020

Coronavirus - COVID-19 - Update

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you and your family continue to be well.

We welcomed back our Year R, Reception children last week, in addition to the children from Year 6, Year 1, key workers and those already attending school. I ran a Heads' Meeting online yesterday to confirm the positive feedback. Everyone is well and enjoying having the children back. One head teacher commented "It feels like a school again." Some schools and Trusts have not opened more widely than to children of key workers for reasons of their own, but I am pleased our staff have gone above and beyond in their efforts staying safely within limits but opening to most children.

The next phase is to look at welcoming back some of our Year 5 children where we can. This isn't going to be possible in every school due to space and staffing issues. As we have been told, the social distancing rule will be reduced to 1m, but this still takes much more space in school than usual. Social distancing and classes of no more than 15 use twice the normal staffing ratio which means we are struggling for space and staff to admit more children in our schools. Where we can admit more children, Heads of School will write to you with more details.

I have written to Year 5 parents separately to ask for consent to allow the children access to our digital platform Microsoft 365 which we run across all sites. Whilst schools remain on restrictive attendance, it can be used to communicate with classes and individual pupils, holding online video or audio lessons and by text-based chats, as well as storing and sharing documents for collaborative working. This will allow us to measure children's understanding and progress. Our plan was to roll this out next year, but we have brought those plans forward for obvious reasons. If you are a parent of a current Year 5 child and have not yet given consent, please follow the link below.

<https://www.bridgeschools.co.uk/distance-learning-survey>

All the children regardless of whether they attend school or not will have access to intense 'catch-up' programmes to ensure they make the gains needed. We are writing these plans now to start the Autumn Term with everything in place. We are confident that all children will make the necessary progress. The press is calling this a 'failed generation' I don't believe that to be the case. In my experience, children are remarkably resilient and quick to pick up new ideas, concepts and practices. Nobody would have wanted a set of circumstances such as we have found ourselves in. It has been a very difficult time on many fronts, but we are making our way through. In recognition of the extraordinary efforts everyone has gone to in keeping the schools open, working through the Easter Holidays and all the bank holidays we will close all our schools at the end of the day on Tuesday 21st July. Except for the one week of the May Holiday, some staff and children have been at school every day since February Half Term.

Thank you for your understanding over us closing on Friday afternoons for this half term, giving us more time for the cleaning of rooms and equipment. We will be continuing the school closure on Friday afternoons after lunch for at least the first half term in the Autumn in order that we can maintain our hygiene levels. We will make provision where possible for those who need to continue to work and rely on us for childcare.

We don't yet know what September will look like but hope that we will be able to accommodate all children, in all of our schools. Whether everything is relaxed, or we need to continue with the additional systems we will have to change spaces within our schools. To give staff time to adjust to new practices and prepare to welcome children back staff will work in school on Thursday 3rd and Friday 4th September but we will keep all of our schools closed to children until Monday 7th September 2020.

For the children in Year 2, 3 and 4 it has been a long stretch without attending school. The online learning is still being updated by staff, this is taking an increasing amount of time as staff are in school working with children and uploading work to websites for children unable to attend to access. If you have difficulty in accessing the material, we can provide printed copies to complete at home. Do what you can to keep children reading and thinking. We have access to a wide variety of digital reading material available through the Education Library Service. We spent over £30,000 to give children a rich experience of both printed and digital literature. Please do make use of these links if you can. The children are fortunate to have access to such a wide range of material, as one supermarket slogan runs: 'Every little helps!' Please try to apply that notion to your children's reading habits.

Things will return in September, and in some respects will be better. As staff we have had to rely on each other to help to provide service for you and your children. The value of working as a group of schools within a Trust has proved itself to be a worthy model. Without the work across the Trust, half of our schools would not have been able to open at all. Working this way has meant we have had access to everything we produce together to help us all to do the best job we can working with your children.

Thank you for your support, I hope you and your families continue to stay safe and well.

With all good wishes,

Adrian Massey and everyone at Bridge Schools.