

10th June 2020

Coronavirus - COVID-19 – Update

Dear Parents and Carers,

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

As you know, we welcomed back our Year 1 children on Monday, in addition to the children from Year 6, key workers and those already attending school. Again, this has worked well, thanks to the preparations put in by staff and for parent cooperation on each of the school sites. Some of the staggered starts and finishes are spaced out but everyone has made it work without any significant issues.

I ran a virtual meeting with heads this afternoon and we all agreed that most schools are ready to move to the next phase of opening our schools to children in the Reception Year. Heads will write to you separately about start times and using relevant entrances and exits on each school site.

Each group, or 'bubble' as the government has advised will not exceed 15 with each staff member but where possible we will try to keep these groups as small as we can. Exercising social distancing with four and five-year-old children will be more challenging as children naturally gravitate towards each other and want to play. We will guide the children to adopt new behaviours and ways of working just as we have done ourselves. There are many social, emotional and educational benefits for the Reception Year children to return to school which we will capitalise on over the remaining weeks of term. Educationally, reading is such an important life skill and we are keen to ensure that the children in Reception complete their phonic skills training which we will be able to complete more quickly due to working in smaller groups. We will do everything we can to ensure children make the educational gains they need.

We will run this phase of opening for two weeks before we consider opening further. As things stand it is unlikely that we will be able to open to all our children in Nursery, other than those nursery children of key workers who are already in attendance. We need to run these groups as groups of no more than eight and currently don't have the staff available as they are being used elsewhere to support other year groups and staff rotas.

You will have seen the latest government announcement that schools are no longer required to open more widely to other year groups for the remainder of the summer term. This is sensible, as we are unable to maintain the requirement for social distancing, educating in groups of no more than 15 and open to the whole school as it obviously takes twice the space and twice the staffing to make this work. We have over 350 staff available, of whom just under 50 are shielding or self-isolating. If the number of staff who are self-isolating increases, we reduce capacity for covering class groups. We are beginning to see reports from parents to say they are self-isolating as people return to work and inevitably mix with other groups of people. Parents so far have been very honest in letting school staff know about them displaying symptoms and staying away from school. The more we can protect the children and staff on site the longer we will be able to keep our schools open. If we have confirmed cases come through from staff or parents, we will contact Public Health England who will advise us of the next steps. Heads will let you know more information if this occurs on school sites and if needed, we will close to the group with whom the children were working. We hope to keep everywhere open until the end of term in five and a half weeks' time.

If your child is not in Year 6, Year 1 or Year Reception, I would again like to reiterate please only send your child if you are working in one of the identified key worker groups and need to access 'educare' from your child's school, we are currently unable to accept children from other working groups or children from Year 2-5. We are trying to keep numbers as low as possible in each class space to maximise social distancing. In some schools we may need to apply a cap to the number of children we can admit as more people want access to the service. The guidance on identified key workers can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>. For now, numbers are manageable but please only access provision if you need it.

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. From the hundreds of parents using the schools we have only had a very small number for whom this was an issue where we have found alternatives for them.

For the children in Year 2, 3, 4 and 5 we would encourage you to access at least some of the online learning we are providing and speak to schools if you have difficulty in accessing the material as we can provide printed copies to complete at home. However, as I have said before, don't bring stress into the household at a difficult time if this is one thing too many then leave it, but an hour of learning each day – in whatever form it comes must be a good thing for expanding children's minds. We are particularly keen to support our Year 5 children to ensure they complete Key Stage 2 with the requisite skills in readiness for their path to secondary education. We will see what changes come in through the summer in readiness for September.

Thank you for your support and positive comments to staff in school, it is much appreciated. Everyone is working as hard as they can to keep things operational for the children.

With all good wishes,

Adrian Massey and everyone at Bridge Schools.