



6 July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you are safe and well?

COVID-19: update

We are now into our final two weeks of the academic year and as such I thought it would be timely to write to you with another update.

Widening access to school and the end of term

Thank you for your support over the past few weeks as we have widened access to pupils/students across our Trust. As previously described, we have now reached capacity in several schools and this has had some impact on the remaining availability of staffing to maintain distance learning for those at home. It has been a hugely complex set of circumstances to work with, but throughout our staff teams have worked incredibly hard to do their best for the children.

Individual Trust schools have been developing transition activities and appropriate 'sign off' for the end of the school year for Year 6 pupils. It is with great regret that I have to inform you that our Health and Safety advice does not permit schools to host any parental events, even with social distancing in place and so the end of this term will ultimately feel quite sad for us all, I am sure.

Summer holidays

Earlier this week, the Government confirmed that schools will not be expected to make provision over the school holidays – quoting directly from the DfE, “Teachers, support staff and school leaders deserve a break, to recharge and rest.”

This means that our STAR MAT schools will close on their previously advised last day of term and no provision will be available on school sites over the summer including for Key Worker families.

Arrangements for widening access to schools in the next academic year

I am sure you will have seen that the government has now released guidance regarding school reopening for September. This is a long and complex document which is fundamentally based on the assumption that infection rate, shielding and social distancing will all continue to show improvement through the summer. We have already commenced work considering risk assessment processes and planning, but may not be able to share the full details with you until later, possibly well into the summer holidays as we want to dedicate time to getting it right. Furthermore, some of the presumptions within the DfE advice are hard to visualise at this time, when we are some 2 months away and lockdown is only just being lifted.

A brief summary of some of the key points from the guidance

I do think it important to try and summarise some of the key intentions within the DfE plan, which might help families consider arrangements such as childcare:

- It is intended that all students in all years should be able to, and will be expected to, return; you may have seen that attendance expectations are to be re-introduced;
- Pupils/students will be arranged into 'protective bubbles' as now, but these will be larger to encompass whole classes or year groups – this will be determined through school level risk assessments;
- Within these bubbles, the intention is then that much of school life can resume and indeed the 'bubble rules' are somewhat different to those currently in place – staff will be allowed to change bubbles to facilitate lesson change and teacher preparation time, but movement around school will need to be minimised;
- These bubbles will also see some staggering of break and lunchtimes, assemblies and so on, to minimise numbers present in any one place;
- Social distancing indications are planned to vary according to age of pupil/students but generally staff will be expected to socially distance 2m from each other and from pupils/students wherever possible. Children will be expected to maintain 'age appropriate' distance from each other;
- Some areas of the curriculum may be limited for some year groups – for example a focus on early literacy and reading in Early Years, some changes to how practical lessons e.g. music or art lessons can be carried out. This again will be part of school level detail to follow;
- The intention is to have as wide a curriculum offer as possible, including the number of hours in classes, but, schools will be allowed to vary start and finish times, breaktimes etc to allow for a staggered arrival and departure from site. With this in mind, we would urge families to ensure their initial childcare arrangements for the autumn are flexible;
- In theory for those schools operating childcare, before and after school clubs, these should be able to re-open in the autumn, but there may be some 'cap' beyond those ordinarily in place on numbers of pupils/students – those schools implicated will be risk assessing this as a matter of urgency and hoping to convey this as early information to parents;
- Transport arrangements will need to be further clarified by the authorities providing for our pupils/students, but the guidance suggests that school buses can resume in most cases, so long as bubble groups sit together within transport;
- The current healthcare measures will remain in place with regard to pupils/students or staff who present with symptoms and notification to parents, Public Health etc; we will clarify all of these communication channels closer to re-opening. We already have well established advice routes to give us guidance with regard to sending home students, closure of bubbles and so on;
- There is an expectation that school uniform should be worn as normal for all children other than those in the Sixth Form.

There is much to consider so please bear with us as we consider the guidance centrally as a Trust and then in turn at individual school level. I would again request that comparisons between schools are not made as each institution will be very much working within its own context to ensure that individual risk assessment considerations are addressed. As with the wider access in June, I would ask parents not to contact schools directly concerning arrangements for September as these will be communicated as each school finalises them. Please watch out for information through the normal communication channels used by your child's school.

We must remember that it is the best part of two months until this advice comes into place and that specifics within the guidance might change during that period - our detailed advice will be most accurate if released closer to opening. Nevertheless we will all be delighted to welcome our pupils/students back and to re-engage with a full and active school life.

'Catch-up' funding

We still await key further detailed information and guidance on how schools can access and will be expected to use 'catch up' funding. We are, however, already looking at early assessment activities so that learning can be personalised and our aim is to see every pupil/student back on course as soon as possible; especially, but not exclusively, students in Year 11 and Year 13 who are reaching key points in their schooling.

Examination results days (secondary)

Pending the issue of any further government guidance, the intention of both our secondary schools is currently that Year 11 and Year 13 examination results will be distributed to students in school personally as in previous years. Our schools are currently working on the logistics of this, but given social distancing guidance, it is unlikely, sadly, that parents will be able to accompany their children other than dropping off and picking up. Details will follow from each school shortly.

Farewell

There is a chance that this may be my last formal communication with you before I step down as CEO. I am delighted that Ian Yapp is taking over as CEO; he is an incredibly talented and committed leader and I have huge confidence that he will continue to successfully steer the Trust forward through these challenging times.

It has been an immense pleasure and privilege to have led the Trust over the last two years and I am very much looking forward to my new role as a member of the Trust Board in September.

Yours sincerely

Mr M Sibley
Chief Education Officer