 LONG MEADOW SCHOOL

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Headteacher: Mr Philip Gray BEd (Hons) CANTAB, NPQH

Tuesday 12 May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers

Last night, following on from the Prime Minister’s announcement on Sunday, the Government sent out the latest guidance for schools to follow. As you are aware this will be initially for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. I wanted to share some of this information with you today.

**Why can more children now attend school?**

The Government want to get all children back into education as soon as the scientific advice allows because it is the best place for them to learn, and because they know it is good for children’s mental wellbeing to have social interactions with other children, carers and teachers.

As a result of the huge efforts everyone has made to adhere to strict social distancing measures, the transmission rate of coronavirus has decreased. They anticipate with further progress that they **may** be able, from the week commencing 1 June, to welcome back more children to school. They will only do this provided that the 5 key tests set by government justify the changes at the time, including that the rate of infection is decreasing and the enabling programmes set out in the recovery strategy are operating effectively. As a result, they are asking schools to plan on this basis, ahead of confirmation that these tests are met.

**What does the latest scientific advice say?**

The latest scientific advice to government is that:

* there is high scientific confidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they contract coronavirus and there is moderately high scientific confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus
* limiting the numbers of children going back to school and college initially then gradually increasing numbers, guided by scientific advice, reduces risk of increasing the rate of transmission
* schools and other settings can make changes to how they are organised and put measures in place to reduce risks

They have provided advice to schools on the steps we should consider taking, this includes:

* limiting the amount of contact between different groups of children (such as smaller class sizes with children and staff spread out more)
* additional protective measures, such as increased cleaning and encouraging good hand and respiratory hygiene

**Can my child return to school?**

From the week commencing 1 June, they are asking:

* primary schools to welcome back children in reception, year 1 and year 6
* all schools to continue to offer places to the priority groups – vulnerable children and children of critical workers – that we have been supporting since the end of March

**What if my child is eligible but has siblings who are not?**

They are asking that only reception, year 1 and year 6 return to school from 1 June. This does not include siblings in different year groups unless those siblings are in a priority group, for example, the children of critical workers.

They hope that all primary school children can come back to school before the summer holidays, for a month if feasible, although this will be kept under review. Reducing the risks for children and staff is their utmost priority.

**How will risks to children, teachers and families be managed?**

As a school we have been asked to reduce the risk of transmission as more children return. This list of ‘what’ is extensive. We will of course communicate the final details once the plan has been finalised but some of the things we have been asked to do include:

* carrying out a risk assessment before opening, so that sensible measures can be put in place to minimise those risks for children, young people and staff
* making sure that children and young people do not attend if they or a member of their household has symptoms of coronavirus
* promoting regular hand washing for 20 seconds with running water and soap or use of sanitiser and ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the catch it, bin it, kill it approach
* cleaning more frequently to get rid of the virus on frequently touched surfaces, such as door handles, handrails, table tops, play equipment and toys
* minimising contact through smaller classes or group sizes and altering the environment as much as possible, such as changing the layout of classrooms
* reducing mixing between groups through timetable changes, such as staggered break times or by introducing staggered drop-off and collection times

**If my child is eligible, is it compulsory for them to attend school?**

The Government strongly encourages children and young people in the eligible year groups and priority groups (such as children of critical workers) to attend, unless they are self-isolating or there are other reasons for absence (such as shielding due to health conditions).

Parents will not be fined for non-attendance at this time

**Will education be provided as normal to children who are attending?**

The Government have still given schools the flexibility to provide support and education to children and young people attending school in the way they see fit during this time. They say that Early Years should use their best endeavours to deliver the learning and development requirements as far as possible in the current circumstances.

As a school we have been asked to plan how to support and educate the children including:

* consideration of pupils’ mental health and wellbeing
* assessment of where pupils are in their learning in order to make any necessary adjustments to their curriculum over the coming weeks
* prioritisation of high needs groups and support for those in transition years

**Will the school keep their usual opening hours?**

It is possible that we will make changes to our start and finish times or introduce processes for drop-off and collection times to keep children and families safe. Any changes to start and finish times will be clearly communicated to parents and carers alongside any other new arrangements as we have them.

So to conclude, all I ask of you for now is to trust us. Trust us to make the right plans and decisions to keep you and your children as safe as we possibly can, whilst ensuring our staff and their families are also safe. We have been, and will continue to be, truthful and open with you when it comes to your children’s safety.

Do I want the staff and children back? Of course. Are you nearing the end of you tether at home? Of course you are. However, I am not going to sit here and say to you that we can achieve social distancing in school. We can always make things safer, we could perhaps reduce the risks, but as soon as we open the school, experience tells me risk will be there.

We will continue to pass on information, make a plan and share it with you. When you have it, you must make your own decisions. There will of course be some of you who will say “let’s just get on with it”. I respect that, but I ask, get on with what? I always have and always will make decisions both as a Headteacher and as a parent; decisions that support the families and community that we serve.

Until the time comes that we have more information or the finer details of a plan I hope this information (and maybe my thoughts) help you make sense of what the next part of ’normal’ may look like

Yours Sincerely

Mr Gray