

22 May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I just wanted to give you a brief update on where we are as a school with regard to current thinking around the school reopening.

As I am sure that you are aware the government, particularly the Department for Education (DfE) has stated that primary schools should start a phased reopening from 1 June 2020 and that secondary schools should seek some face-to-face contact with Year 10 and Year 12 from 1 June 2020, with the caveat that it must be safe to do so before this starts. Guidance has been produced around the proposed reopening of primary schools and this has in and off itself created many issues for primary colleagues.

The DfE are yet to produce any guidance for secondary schools. As a result of the lack of guidance, I have had to draw up a provisional plan for reopening based on the guidance for primary schools and in anticipation of there being some clearer instructions at some point for our setting. As soon as this guidance for secondary schools is issued, I will amend the plan and look to share it with you as soon as I am able to.

I have met virtually with most of the other Wirral secondary headteachers and we are all conscious that you as parents and carers, and our staff, are eager to better understand what happens next. I know that many primary headteachers have written to parents with details of a proposed four phase reopening of Wirral primary schools and that this will for the most part be coordinated across Wirral primary schools. This is phased reopening is being proposed to help parents/carers plan and for schools to support each other, and their own communities. As secondary headteachers we in turn agreed to some shared principles this week.

It is clear that there is a lack of certainty and even the most basic of guidance for the return of secondary schools, and it is beholden on us to act in as safe a manner as is possible at this time and to do so requires further advice and guidance from the DfE. To that end we have agreed that:

- No secondary school will seek to reopen on 1 June 2020
- We will await the review of medical guidance on 28 May 2020 and hope that there is greater clarity around issues such as transmission in school, but also transmission on public transport and teenagers within the community as a whole
- As secondary schools we have been promised for a while now that advice and guidance would be published with regard to secondary schools and we must wait for this guidance before finalising plans as we are currently working from guidance for primary schools

- We are seeking as secondary headteachers to begin to reopen for Years 10 and 12 from mid-June if government guidance supports this when published
- However, the overriding principle has to be that we think that our individual schools can open in a manner that mitigates risk and allows for the safest possible conditions for all members of our community during this health crisis.

I do wish I could say more, but we are being left to operate in a vacuum, with the government giving parents dates to reopen, but then having not prepared the supporting information for schools. I have written a plan and we are working to put this in place, developing rigorous risk assessments, ensuring that cleaning materials are in place and that rooms are cleared and cleaned, but the reality is that I am guessing based on primary guidance what the DfE want us to do. In reality it is quite possible that all the work undertaken, all the changes the site staff and cleaning staff are putting in place might well be part of a plan that is thrown away. However, we are making a start and we want to try to bring students back as soon as possible; hopefully the guidance will be published by the DfE soon.

Today is the last day of half-term and I must confess that I had forgotten about the break as days seem to run into each other at the moment. I long for a return to school, as do the staff in general and a return to some sense of normality. Teachers are creatures of habit, long after most people have left the school bell behind, that bell still rules our day and dominates the structure of our lives. After 25 years of teaching, the last few months have shown me just how conditioned I am by my job, but I have to say to you that when we return school will not be as it was when we left it. September is fast approaching and I cannot see how we will be back to normal by then. You need to anticipate that September 2020 will be very different from September 2019.

Please bear with us as we move forward. I am a bit of a scrapper and a younger me may well have thought 'come on, let's get in to school and take it on', but thankfully cooler and wiser heads than mine rule the day and that is not going to be allowed. We will only move forward as and when it is safe to do so, and this may well be a long process.

As it is, next week is a 'holiday'; please encourage your children to leave any work behind and try to get out, do some exercise and enjoy in a sensible and safe manner some of our new freedoms. I hope too that you find some peace next week and the weeks ahead.

Take care



Kevin Flanagan