



18th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

Further to the advice and guidance from the Government, I would like to set out our Trust's position in relation to the wider opening of our schools. At this stage, I would like to stress that any wider opening of the Trust schools will only be done once there is sufficient reassurance that it is safe to do so for both children and staff, which I am sure you would want us to have in place.

The Trust and our schools received news of the Government's ambition for the wider opening schools from 1st June at exactly the same time as the rest of the country during the Prime Minister's briefing on Sunday evening. The Trust and Principals immediately began to consider plans as, like yourselves, they want nothing more than to have children back in school learning and socialising with their friends.

What has the Government asked schools to do?

Last week, against a backdrop a slight easing of the current 'lockdown' procedures, schools were asked by the Government to begin preparing for a partial return to school of children from the year groups Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 and consideration of support to Year 10 students.

We do recognise the desire that children need to return to school at some point and also to support parents and carers in returning to work. The Government have made clear that schools will only open if the five tests they have stipulated have been met. These five tests are:

1. Protect the NHS's ability to cope. We must be confident that we are **able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment** right across the UK.
2. See a **sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates** from COVID-19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak.
3. Reliable data from SAGE showing that **the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels** across the board.
4. Be confident that **the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand**, with supply able to meet future demand.
5. Be confident that **any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections** that overwhelms the NHS.

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The government produced a wide range of information detailing the actions schools would have to take prior to increased numbers of children returning. Some of these measures included:

- reduced class sizes to adhere to social distancing to a maximum of 15. All of our schools are in the process of having a review of classroom capacity undertaken and we expect that for a large number of rooms this maximum number will be far lower.
- children to remain in the same group at all times with no mixing
- children to have the same teacher all the time
- increased hand washing facilities
- separate entry and exit points
- no parents / carers allowed on site
- one way systems to be established in schools
- reduced timetable / flexible days / staggered start & finish times
- home schooling resources to continue to be available
- desks to be positioned 2m apart if possible
- soft furnishings / toys to be removed from Nursery / Reception / other classrooms
- toys and equipment not to be shared
- small equipment which cannot be easily cleaned must not be used
- staggered break times with no mixing of groups
- additional cleaning throughout the day and week

There are a number of other requirements but I am sure you can understand that in any reopening the *children's experience in school will be far removed from their usual routine and timetable*. When we are in a position to open for additional children we may need to have a flexible approach which enables us to make the school environment as safe as we can and we will set out guidance which will have to be adhered to by all children and families. Even with all these additional measures in place, we will not be in any position to guarantee that both children and adults may not be exposed to the virus at some point in our settings. All of this will be a challenge for school staff, children and parents / carers, but collaboratively will all do our very best to support each other.

May half-term

The school will be fully closed for all pupils from Monday 25th May and will reopen on Monday 1st June to continue the current provision for key worker and vulnerable pupils. We thank you for your support and understanding to allow school staff the ability to take time to recuperate.

Summer Term

The priority must be for schools to reopen safely – for pupils, staff and parents/carers – as opposed to quickly. Each school needs to go through the guidance and work with staff and parents/carers to draw up plans for wider opening. We note that the Government said “no earlier than 1 June 2020”, so they must realise that it is unlikely that all schools will be re-opened in that timescale.

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For clarity, our aim is to be ready to bring back **small groups** of pupils including Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils from 8th June, **once we feel that the school is as safe as it can be, following rigorous planning and preparation.** Should we need to move this date for any reason, we will continue to communicate with you. We will continue to provide the existing arrangement for designated key workers and vulnerable pupils until such time we are in the position to widen the access to our school.

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What about Attendance during any partial opening?

We would of course like to see as many children as we can safely accommodate in school once the time is right. However, the Government guidance is clear: no school should penalise parents who decide to continue with home learning. Home learning resources and support will continue throughout any partial opening.

What will happen next?

Senior leaders in each school are now working on plans with the Trust which have safeguarding for all as their main focus. These plans will take time to finalise so we can be sure about what is safely achievable and possible at this time. Government guidance is continuing to be published daily and all schools will continue to work alongside each other, the local authority, academy trusts and trade unions to ensure that we welcome additional children into our schools at the most appropriate time. We will endeavour for this to be as soon as safely possible.

To support us in planning for wider opening, your child's school will shortly issue a parent/carer survey to ask about your intentions. If we have an idea of the likely levels of attendance, it will make it easier for us to plan any provision.

When the time comes for more children to safely attend school, **your child / children's school will contact you directly** with further details and the next steps for you and your child / children.

In the meantime, we ask for your continued support and patience. Schools will continue to support the childcare of our Key Workers and other identified children as they have been doing since the onset of this crisis. Teachers will also continue to provide a wide range of online / home learning resources to ensure your children can access age appropriate learning activities. And of course, we will always keep the wellbeing of our children and families at the forefront of our minds through our regular phone calls and social media presence. We will continue to support you all to the very best of our ability and capacity.

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Please look after yourselves and each other and if you need any additional advice or guidance, then staff in your school will always be willing to help. Please check individual school websites for contact details. In these circumstances, rumours on social media and online news outlets can sometimes cause confusion. To ensure reliable and clear communication from the school, their website sylvesterprimaryschool.co.uk and twitter feed [@sylvesterschool](https://twitter.com/sylvesterschool) will be used as the official method of communication.

Thank you for your continued support and for your understanding in this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Gary Kelly
Chief Executive Officer

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