

Friday 22nd May

Dear Parents,

As we arrive at half-term I wanted to write to provide an update on the school's planning and preparation for a possible return to school for pupils in some year groups.

The government is proposing that schools reopen for pupils in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. As yet the government is not asking for schools to reopen for pupils in Years 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9. They will make a final decision on 28th May and state that schools should reopen on 1st June, at the earliest. It is important to note that at present all of this remains provisional and tentative.

Earlier this week one of our key Governors' committees (Finance and General Purposes) met and discussed this issue. Later today there will be a meeting of our Governors' Health, Safety & Environment Committee, and following that a meeting with our staff representative body. Whilst as an independent school we are not bound by decisions made by Oldham Borough Council, we note their decision, announced on Wednesday, that the local authority will leave decisions to individual schools. Their statement said: *"Schools will be in different positions depending on how they've been impacted and in their own way. We're not imposing a one-size fits all approach to the schools"*.

Our view is that there is a very short gap between the 28th May (Thursday) when a final decision will be taken by the government, and guidance possibly refined, and 1st June (Monday). We will therefore not be open for any pupils, other than the children of key workers on 1st June. However, we are continuing to prepare for a possible opening soon after that.

We have been undertaking a detailed risk assessment which we will publish, and completing an extensive checklist sent by the National Education Union. The school's Health, Safety and Environment Committee will meet again on 29th May, followed later that day by a further meeting of the school's Finance and General Purposes Committee. We will use the week beginning 1st June to analyse whatever further guidance is given by the government on 28th May, finalise our preparations, provide further reassurance for parents and staff, and train staff that will be coming into school. I would not anticipate pupils, other than the children of key workers who are already attending, coming into school before Monday 8th June.

Any wider return to school for pupils this half-term will not look like our normal provision, as we will be following stringent hygiene and social distancing protocols. Mrs Summers and Mrs Knott are writing separately to parents in those year groups to set out our current thinking. The nature of our site means that these arrangements would be different for different year groups. Year 6 would be in the senior school building where there will be lots of space to spread children out. Mrs Summers is planning to initially rotate children attending in the Nursery & Infants for two days at a time, interspersed with a deep clean of the rooms. We have plans for: temperature checks, teaching resources, staggered arrival / departure, uniform, dining arrangements, the physical shape of classrooms, the use of outdoor space and the groupings of children.

At present the guidance surrounding Years 10 and 12 and "face to face time" with their teachers remains very vague. Yesterday evening I received a briefing from the Association of Schools and College Leaders on this issue. It said *"Further discussion with the Department for Education this afternoon leads us to advise you to rule out any students in those year groups returning immediately after half-term."* However, we can see the value in these young people being able to come into school before the summer break and we will be working towards achieving this over the coming weeks.

I was anticipating a wide range of parental opinion on this matter, and that was borne out by the results of the short survey. My thanks to parents for completing this. On that survey:

- 30% of parents said they would send their children to school on 1st June, if it was open for their child's year group;
- 26% of parents said they would not send their children to school on 1st June, even if it was open for their child's year group.
- 44% of parents said they could not say at this stage.

These results are not surprising and reflect the national debate at present. In the free comments section a number of parents commented that they could not see the point in rushing a return to school as they were pleased with the distance learning being provided. I should stress that our distance learning provision will continue throughout the coming half-term whatever decision is made as regards children coming into school. This will also apply in year groups that are able to attend. This will present challenges for us but we believe that parents need to make decisions based upon their view of the safety of sending their children to school, rather than feeling pressured because they fear that their children will not receive educational provision if they don't send them to school. In order to help us plan accordingly, Mrs Knott and Mrs Summers will now be gauging parental opinion again in the year groups that we have been asked to open for. I will then reassess wider parental opinion early next half-term.

These issues are complex and highly emotive. We are very keen that our pupils are able to return to some sort of normality as soon as possible. However, we care deeply about the safety of our staff, pupils and their families and it is extremely difficult to find the appropriate balance in the current circumstances. I am grateful for the ongoing support of our parents at this time and would ask for your continued patience as we navigate through this crisis.

May I take this opportunity to wish all pupils and parents a safe and pleasant half-term break.

Yours sincerely,

CJD Mairs
(Principal)