

Friday 15th May 2020

Dear Colleagues, Parents, Carers, Governors, Trustees and Children,

We would like to start by saying a huge thank you for your patience, hard work, kindness and resilience over the last eight weeks. Together we have faced the most challenging time in living memory and by pulling together and working in as smart a way as possible, we believe that our community has coped magnificently well. We are proud of how we have maintained a good level of support for home schooling, whilst staying open for our key worker children and offering pastoral support for anyone who has needed it. This would not have been possible without each and every one of you.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement last Sunday, the Trust leadership team have spent this week working through the detailed information and guidance from the government regarding how children in Year's N, R, 1 and 6 might start to return to school from June 1st. We have chosen to send this letter to all families, staff, governors and trustees together so that the entire Inclusive Multi Academy Trust community is fully informed of this ever-evolving situation.

You, like us, have many questions and some understandable anxiety about opening schools to more children. We have received hundreds of comments, thoughts, suggestions and concerns and although we have not answered them individually, I can assure you that we have read and considered every one of them. Thank you to the many of you who have shared these. Please do continue to send them in.

As we have said all along, the health, safety and wellbeing of our children, staff, parents and carers must continue to be at the forefront of our thinking, as we prepare for a phased return to school. This has not changed, and our proposed timeline below has been designed to guarantee that we can test, test and retest so that we are able to deliver schooling that is safe for all. The speed of implementation will not be as quick as some of you may like and we apologise for that. We absolutely understand your frustrations but for us, we simply will not compromise our promise of safety for anyone in our community. Our projected timeline is as follows:

Week beginning	Focus
18/05/20	Planning in more detail, discussion with staff, parents and governors
25/05/20	Half term holiday – schools open for keyworker children led by Apex sport at Beechfield school
01/06/20	On site safety training for staff. Focus on social distancing in practice, school re arrangement, safety and wellbeing of staff and pupils, approaches to pastoral needs
08/06/20	Year 6 to return to school
15/06/20	Year 1 to return to school if Year 6 have settled
22/06/20	Year R to return to school if Year 6 & 1 have settled
29/06/20	Year N to return to school if Year 6, 1 & R have settled
06/07/20	Consideration for remaining school years to return depending on government advice

The government has been clear that reopening is subject to positive progress in managing the Covid-19 epidemic. Please remember that the children will only return to school if the rate of transmission is under control at that point, and we can adhere to all the necessary guidelines. The government is reviewing this every three weeks, with the next review on the 28th May.

We have split the next section into some pertinent questions and our responses, according to the latest guidance. Please note government guidance has not been fully released yet and has also undergone changes across this week.

Do I have to return to school?

From our discussions, we know there are parents, children and staff who are keen to get back, those who are nervous but prepared to give it a go and those who are not yet ready and have good reason, as they have medical conditions or live with people with medical conditions who face genuine risk if they are exposed to the virus.

- **Parents** - It is up to you if you send your children to school. If their year group is open, we are here to receive them in school and teach them. If you are not comfortable sending them in, then that is fine. They will be marked as an authorised absence and there will be no negative impact for them. This is your choice.
- **Staff** - Anyone shielding or living with someone who is shielding, you are advised to work from home. For those staff who have medical issues which do not meet the shielding threshold, have childcare issues or are nervous about a return, please speak to us so we can find a suitable solution together.

What safety measures are being put in place?

During our planning next week, we will be completing risk assessments about logistics, grounds, classroom space, social distancing and infection management. Among the many factors outlined in the risk assessment and government guidance, a few of the main considerations are as follows:

- **Reducing the size of classes and keeping children in small groups without mixing with others:** We plan on teaching in 'bubbles' of no more than 15 children. They will stay with their assigned adult(s) in their allocated space throughout the day, and, where at all possible, not mix with the other 'bubbles'. We will attempt to adhere to social distancing rules as far as possible. As you know, and the government understands, keeping children 2m apart at all times cannot be expected (it is impossible). However, we can work to mitigate the risk by allocating work spaces, limiting toys/stationery per child, reducing close play, encouraging consistently good hygiene, and the frequent cleaning of work areas.
- **Staggered breaks and lunch times, as well as drop-offs and pick-ups:** At this stage, we envisage a shorter school day, to give us time to conduct extra cleaning and to ease staff workload. We will also stagger drop-offs and pick-ups, lunchtimes and break times. 'Bubbles' will only be able to play outdoors in their designated zones.
- **Increasing the frequency of cleaning, reducing the use of shared items and utilising outdoor space:** A comprehensive cleaning plan will be put in place. As mentioned, children will be limited to the items/areas that they can use.
- **Dealing with children who become unwell:** If anyone has a new continuous cough/high temperature/ feels unwell at school, they will be sent home. They will need to self-isolate for 7 days, or until tested negative. Anyone in the child's household will need to self-isolate for 14 days. Children, and their families, will be entitled to a test. If a child or adult shows symptoms and tests positive for CoVid-19, then the whole 'bubble' that the child/adult was in will be sent home, and they must self-isolate for 14 days. Staff and children should not attend if they have symptoms or are self-isolating due to symptoms in their household.

My child is not in YN, YR, Y1 or Y6. Will they be returning before the end of the school year?

- The government have said that it is their 'ambition' to bring all pupils back in to school before the end of the school year, but that will depend on a number of factors. We will be better able to answer this question in a few weeks' time.

What about home learning?

- Home learning will still be on offer for all year groups; although, due to teaching commitments, teacher interaction will inevitably be reduced. The plan at this stage is for teachers to deliver their home learning offer in school. Please bear in mind that over the last eight weeks, our staff have been working every weekday planning, delivering and feeding back on children's home learning. There will need to be a compromise when children return to school to be as fair and equitable to all the children and staff as possible.

In order to help us with our planning, we ask that only parents/carers please complete the following survey as soon as possible to indicate your intentions. The responses to this survey will help us formulate the basis of a more detailed plan. <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/VGDFNQL>

There is nothing we want more than to see our schools full of happy children and staff but the road to that is going to be a long one and we need to support each other to get there. This announcement means, that once again, our schools are going to drastically change and adapt for the rest of this term at least. Our attempts to implement the government's plans will not suit everybody and we are sorry for that. We appreciate that these are worrying times, and that this is another major upheaval for us all to endure. We also understand that after such a prolonged period of relative isolation, some people may need to gradually build their confidence to readjust into the 'new normal'. This is the just the start of what may be a number of changes before we get to what was. What we can promise you is that we will do our utmost to keep everyone safe as best we can. We will be in touch soon to communicate further plans as they develop.

Yours faithfully,

Elizabeth Leeman – Chair, Inclusive Multi Academy Trust
Gillian Jackson – Headteacher, Beechfield School
James Roach - Chief Executive Officer, Inclusive Multi Academy Trust
Jess Bruce – Headteacher, Cherry Tree School
Lizzie Butler – Rapid Improvement Partner, Inclusive Multi Academy Trust
Sebastian Gray – Headteacher, Laurance Haines School
Sharon Carlyon – Chief Operations Officer - Inclusive Multi Academy Trust