

15th May 2020

Phased Return to School Information

Dear Parents/Carers

Following a survey sent out to parents in Foundation, Year 1 and Year 6 on Monday, I wanted to clarify some points regarding the suggested reopening of schools from June 1st. Parents requested some clarifications so I have listed these below.

What is the current government guidance?

The government have provided their advice, but as usual, this is vague and gives no clear direction. This means that every school community will interpret it in their own way to suit their own circumstances! We are also taking the advice of the local authority and other schools in the Hinckley area to try and find some clarification and consensus to move forward. Please find the latest guidance by following the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>

The current guidance is suggesting that if the government feel it is safe to do so, then Foundation, Year 1 and Year 6 children will return to school at some point from June 1st and this will be in addition to our critical worker children who have attended since March 23rd.

It is also suggested that we have groups of no more than 15 children and these children are ideally not allowed to mix – the guidance recommends that they stay in the same group or 'bubble', in the same classroom with the same adult/s for the whole time that they are in school. There is also no expectation of 2m social distancing, although they have suggested other measures like continuing with regular handwashing and cleaning of equipment.

As you can imagine, this presents its own issues regarding COVID safety and young children. The reason childhood illnesses spread in school is because we are all in contact with each other! I can put two children in a class, at opposite ends of a room and they will still get chicken pox because that is how it is in a school. The COVID-19 virus is nasty and a super spreader.

What is the school doing to prepare for June 1st?

The senior leadership team have spent the last few days having discussions with staff and our local authority advisor to begin making embryonic plans towards a phased return, based on the latest government guidance. These plans will not be finalised until we are sure that we have the right plan for St. Mary's, which follows the government guidelines as best we can. However, I do want to share our current thinking with you because we are a school family and I believe that you need all the facts about the direction which the government wants us to take.

With the number of small groups (15 children in a group) that we will need to offer, not all children will be looked after by their own class teacher. Some groups will need to be looked after by teaching assistants who are all suitably qualified at St. Mary's (this is due to some staff still shielding at home.)

We will do our utmost to ensure that the children will be in their usual classroom and with their preferred friendship groups. However, this may not always be possible. The usual school timetable and structure of the day will be different and far from **normal**. School will **NOT** be school in that sense and lunch-times and break times will be different. The children will not be playing tag in the playground or having close contact with others.

Due to Health and Safety reasons some familiar equipment may need to be removed particularly soft furnishings; soft toys and toys that are hard to clean (such as those with intricate parts). We know that this will cause anxiety for some pupils and parents. It causes me anxiety because we have worked hard to create high quality environments where the children can learn and flourish.

In addition to a phased return, the teachers will also need to continue to offer childcare for critical workers and provide online learning and support for other year groups (Year 2, Year 3, Year 4 and Year 5).

What will happen next?

Please be assured that we will not re-open for the specified year groups until we are 100% prepared and our plans are based on what we as a school community need and want. I anticipate (and hope!) that the guidance may be updated in the next two weeks to support a phased return, but until it is, we will endeavour to facilitate a safe return by interpreting the guidance ourselves to suit our school.

Bearing in mind the points above and the official guidance, I want you to know that we miss you and your children, and do want to welcome them back to school as soon as it is safe to do so! We remain committed to helping our school community feel safe and secure as we move forwards; **if you as parents decide that the situation in school is too concerning, we would absolutely support you in the decision to keep your child/ren out of school. We will not fine for non-attendance or let it affect their attendance record.**

The speculation in the press and on social media will now be about how schools can open safely (or whether they should open at all before September), and it will intensify over the next two weeks. As always, at St. Mary's, we take the view that we need to consider all of our actions and communications to parents and children carefully, before making decisions. These decisions will always first and foremost take into account the welfare and well-being of staff, pupils and parents in our school. **Once the school have made any decisions (following all government guidelines), we will let you know through our usual channels.**

Until then, **please do not worry or compare us to other schools** – we are unique and must make decisions which suit us as a school community bearing in mind our space constraints. This means that the provision we provide will more than likely be only on a part-time basis **two full days** at most per year group.

I am sorry to be blunt in what I have described but as a parent myself, I would want to know exactly what reopening looks like.



ST. MARY'S

'With God All Things Are Possible.'

Matthew 19:26



Next week we will be contacting parents for some definitive decisions on school return. What I do ask though, is that you decide one way or the other. To ensure the maximum safety of all, it will take a lot of organising and we cannot have children dropping in and out for obvious safety reasons.

Thank you for the time you have given to reading this letter. I hope that it answers all of the questions that you have had.

As always, if you need to talk, please do not hesitate to phone or email me – we will get through this difficult period together as a school family.

Take care and stay safe!

Yours sincerely

Mrs. R Ayres

Head teacher

