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14th May 2020

TO ALL FAMILIES

Dear Parents & Carers,

As you know, for the last 7 weeks, our schools have been operating very differently from usual, largely online and through "virtual" technology. Teachers, support staff and the IT team have worked exceptionally hard to generate an impressive Home Learning offer, which most families are engaging in. We have seen some incredible and inspiring feedback from families on 'Evidence for Learning' and through other communications, which has lifted everyone's spirits. Thank you to everyone who is involved in creating this wonderful resource and in using it to such great effect.

As well as the online Home Learning, we have also been sending out resource packs that have been well received. We are currently working on "WOW" bags for those learners who would benefit from them and more resource and topic packs are being developed to deliver home to you.

It continues to be the case that everyone – children, young people and adults – are safer at home and that by staying at home, we are helping to reduce the risk of increasing the transmission of horrible Covid-19. As the person held accountable for this community, I am clear that it is my principle duty to do all that I can to minimise the risk to children and young people, to families and to my colleagues, of infection. I can only do this by minimising contact between people.

This can be achieved by providing a range of ways to support families that does not involve everyone being in school all together at the same time, and by ensuring as many people who are able to effectively work from home can do so.

The announcement by the Government on Sunday 10th May 2020 that more Primary aged children will be encouraged to go to school has created significant anxiety among families and staff. We all know our children will not understand the "rules" of social distancing and will be equally distraught if the staff appear in face masks, goggles and gloves. As I have said before, we need to be cautious and careful. Getting everyone back to school – which we all long for – cannot be at any cost. The Government issued further guidance for schools on Monday evening (11th May). Special School Headteachers have been lobbying for separate consideration of our unique and complex situations and, for the first time, there is specific mention of special schools:

"Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools will work towards a phased return of more children and young people without a focus on specific year groups."

Our schools have been open since the first week of the Easter holidays, providing a combination of:

- essential childcare for key workers with no alternative provision;
- emergency respite for families who really need it;
- emergency food and shopping services;
- contact to provide links to other agencies;
- online Home Learning and resources.

We are supporting around 70 families with in-school or exercise groups, but the vast majority of our provision and support is through home contact calls and distanced visits, via the online Home Learning sites and through 'Evidence for Learning'.

Going forward, as we try to offer more in-school opportunities to increasing numbers of children, it will be through an extension of this combination. After the May half term holiday (week commencing 25th May 2020), we will gradually offer more children a mixture of days at school, an exercise group and Home Learning, supported by resource packs over a phased period of time. Because we MUST ensure the schools have plenty of space, no child or young person will be in school every day. The majority will be offered one or two days at school, with one or two exercise group sessions and a resource pack to support Home Learning.

If required by families, we will aim to keep one day per week free of all children and young people except those who need to access certain therapies, such as rebound or physiotherapy that cannot be carried out at home. Their particular vulnerability means that we cannot risk them accessing school with lots of other children.

Many of you will not wish to expose your child and family to the inevitable risk that any of this brings. We can do our level best, through good hand hygiene; effective cleaning; use of PPE for personal care; ensuring staff and children with any symptoms have access to testing and through reduced numbers in the building, to minimise the risk, but I will not pretend that it eradicates it, because it doesn't. If you feel this is not a risk you can take, please talk to us about other ways we may be able to support your child with their learning. It is not my intention to prosecute anyone due to poor attendance. I prefer to have everyone safe and well. Equally, starting the trek back to something starting to approach "normal" is also important, although I don't think it will be fully achieved for a while yet.

It would be really useful if you could let me know – through the contact calls with your teacher or by emailing the school or one of my colleagues – whether you would like your child to be included in planning for after half term, or if you would prefer to wait until September for in-school provision, sticking with the Home Learning for now. You could also indicate whether you would like to be included in the Exercise Group planning as a "half-way house". Children/young people are collected from home by staff and taken for an exercise outing for about an hour and a half. Some walk, some go in buggies, some cycle. Some go individually with two staff and some in pairs, also with two staff.

We will do what we can. It still won't be "business as usual" because we just can't do that safely, but we will do our best to provide as much as can be offered, while ensuring our community of children, young people, families and staff, are protected as far as is humanly possible.

Lastly, I would like to thank you for the overwhelming responses to Home Learning and for the wonderful feedback so many of you have been providing. My colleagues and I are in awe of you and regularly share beautiful "highlights of the week" in our meetings. Thank you so much. Much as I love and respect the NHS, on Thursday nights, it's you and my colleagues I am clapping for because you are all heroes too.

Yours faithfully



Jacqui Warne
Executive Head

