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| Highworth Combined School |

**Parents of eligible children need to respond by Monday 18th May if you would like your children to come back to school.**

This letter is about the planned wider opening of schools on 1st June. The Government has said that this will only go ahead if it’s 5 tests are met. There is significant doubt that these tests will be met, or that I will be able to say that it is safe to open the school (do I have enough staff available? Am I able to have the PPE that is required in exceptional circumstances?). Therefore, all the information shared today is provisional. In addition, it is likely that you will have questions that are not answered in this message. You may be horrified to know that this is only the first of many letters that I expect to send between now and the 1st June and I hope that over the course of that time I will provide the answers you need. In the meantime, the Government documents given in the message may be of help as they have informed every element of our plan.

When I wrote to you on the 20th March, as the school closed to most pupils, I told you that relationships were at the heart of everything that we do at Highworth; I hope that you feel we have continued to demonstrate this in our words and actions during the long 9 weeks since then. Hopefully, it will not therefore come as a surprise to hear that restabilising the relationships between your children and their teachers, essential for wellbeing, has been the starting point for our plans for wider opening of the school. For obvious reasons, the safety of everyone in our community has taken equal billing.

When trying to plan for a safe and appropriate return to school for your children, we have paid close attention to the Governments guidance, apparently based on the latest scientific evidence, none of which they have chosen to share at this point in time. They have so far simply stated the following: *because there is moderately high scientific confidence in evidence suggesting younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with coronavirus (COVID-19).* They have not provided any information on the evidence on the part that children play in the transmission of the virus. Nor have they provided any evidence about the impact of their proposals upon the health and safety of adults working in schools, or the parents and family members of children attending school when they return home.

The Government document giving advice on wider opening of schools for parents and carers can be viewed using this link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>.

The strategies required by the Government to minimise risk to all children and adults have been laid out in a document from the Department for Education ‘Coronavirus: implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

*In all education, childcare and social care settings, preventing the spread of coronavirus involves dealing with direct transmission (for instance, when in close contact with those sneezing and coughing) and indirect transmission (via touching contaminated surfaces). A range of approaches and actions should be employed to do this. These can be seen as a hierarchy of controls that, when implemented, creates an inherently safer system, where the risk of transmission of infection is substantially reduced. These include:*

* *minimising contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have coronavirus symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend childcare settings, schools or colleges*
* *cleaning hands more often than usual - wash hands thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap and dry them thoroughly or use alcohol hand rub or sanitiser ensuring that all parts of the hands are covered*
* *ensuring good respiratory hygiene by promoting the ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach*
* *cleaning frequently touched surfaces often using standard products, such as detergents and bleach*
* *minimising contact and mixing by altering, as much as possible, the environment (such as classroom layout) and timetables (such as staggered break times)*

You will note that there is no reference to the use of social distancing (remaining 2 metres apart from anyone not in your household). This is pleasing as any pretence that social distancing is achievable in a school where some pupils are as young as 3 is ridiculous. Although we will do our best to promote social distancing for all pupils, it will not be possible and I will not tell you otherwise.

The instructions tell us that PPE is not required (except in a few specific cases where children require intimate care, are unwell or injured) so we will not be wearing gloves or face masks.

The document goes on to say that we must create small groups of no more than 15 children, who remain as a ‘pod’ that does not mix with any other ‘pod’ throughout the day, as a further strategy for limiting the spread of the virus. In order to do this, it is suggested that we spread classes across available space within the school, utilising staff from other year groups to teach. This is not an approach I am prepared to take. It would mean that half of our pupils would have to be taught in a classroom which they may never have visited, with furniture and resources completely unsuited to their needs (think of the difference between our Nursery and a year 3 classroom), being taught by a teacher they have never met before. This is not conducive to wellbeing and relationships.  Furthermore, this would have to change again 2 weeks into the new term as the Government’s stated ‘ambition’ is to have all primary pupils back in school for the last month of the Summer Term.

In addition, inviting half of the school, 200 children and you, their parents, on to our site each morning and afternoon cannot be safely managed whilst abiding by the social distancing requirements that remain in place at all times (except during the school day!).

Whilst saying all of this, I must make it clear that I do understand that this terrible virus will be with us for a long time yet, and that clearly, schools cannot remain closed to most pupils indefinitely. We have to find the safest way to allow more children to spend time in school. This has been the objective of my team and I as we try to find a middle ground. Our plan is therefore to provide part time school attendance for all pupils in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. In addition, we will continue to provide emergency childcare from Monday to Friday for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children, as we have been throughout the last 9 weeks.

If your child is in Reception, Year 1 or Year 6, they will be able to come to school on either Monday and Tuesday OR Thursday and Friday (the school will be closed to most pupils on Wednesday). We will ensure that siblings in these year groups are able attend on the same days. We hope to be able to have your children in school on the days that suit you best, but this will depend upon demand.

It essential that we know how many Nursery children would be likely to attend school before being able to say how many days at school we can offer. It may only be 1 day to allow as many as possible to come to school whilst ensuring that we have no more than 15 children in the group. Your help in responding to this email will help me plan and get back to you as soon as possible.

The children of Critical Workers and vulnerable children will be able to continue to attend school on any day of the week between 8am and 4.30pm. Children in this group will spend the day as a separate group in order to achieve the aim of groups not mixing.

I know that this solution will not be universally popular as you all try to find a way to get back to work and to a more ‘normal life’. However, I am sorry to say that I know that this plan is currently the only safe solution for our school.

I now need your help with the next phase of planning:

**URGENT ACTION REQUIRED. PLEASE RESPOND BY 4PM ON MONDAY 18TH MAY**

If your child is in Reception, Year 1 or Year 6:

* Email office@highworthcombined.co.uk or reception@highworthcombined.co.uk to tell us:
1. Name of your child/children
2. Class of your child/children
3. Whether you would like your child to attend school on Monday and Tuesday OR Thursday and Friday

If we don’t hear from you. We will allocate your child to one of the sessions. We will confirm days of attendance next week

If your child is in Nursery:

* Email office@highworthcombined.co.uk or reception@highworthcombined.co.uk to tell us:
1. Name of your child
2. I would like my child to attend Nursery from 1st June yes or no

If you are a Critical Worker:

* Email office@highworthcombined.co.uk or reception@highworthcombined.co.uk to tell us:
1. Name of your child/children
2. Days of the week on which attendance is required

Drop off/collection time within the hours of 8am to 4.30pm

Thank you for taking the time to help us in this way.

My very best wishes

Clare Pankhania