

Harleston C.E. Primary Academy

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Interim Headteacher: Mrs M Foreman

15th June 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

We have now reached the point where I said I would reconsider allowing more children from different year groups back into school. However, before this deadline, the government stepped in and Gavin Williamson, the Secretary of State for Education announced last week that it was no longer possible for schools to admit more children back into schools. In his statement he said that primary schools will not have to take any more pupils before the end of term but the government will work to get every child back in school for September. Williamson acknowledged that full opening of primaries this term would not be possible as the requirements of social distancing are too great.

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey about pupils potentially returning to school after the 15th June review. It was very useful to see all your responses and to get a clear idea about the numbers of children that might return. Sadly, because we still have to maintain social distancing within every classroom this means that we must comply with the government and not admit any more year groups back into school. To help you understand what this looks like in practice, every one of our groups back in school is made up of a pod of up to 15 children who have a teacher and a teaching assistant allocated to them. Where we have job shares, this may mean that another adult is involved on different days of the week. However, they only work with the children and adults in that pod and no one else. Each pod also has their own midday supervisor who again has no contact with other pods - adults or children. Every pod has separate arrangements for breaks and lunchtimes (including different timings) and has designated school playground space to play in. You can imagine (I hope) how many adults this takes up as it is not simply a case that there are a few (very few) empty classrooms in the school and there are no adults left to run any more pods.

This brings me to your questions about what will happen next. The government is expected to produce guidance on what they call 'additional flexibilities' very shortly - but as far as we at Harleston are concerned, what I said before still applies - with the constraints of social distancing, the lack of staff and the lack of space for children to play outside separately from other pods, we are unable to take any more children into school. Last Thursday the government confirmed that schools will not be open for childcare for the children of key workers and vulnerable children during the school holidays. This means that when we close for the summer holidays on 21st July, we really will be closed to all children, having been open every working day since lockdown began. This has implications for our key worker parents who have relied on us for childcare since the beginning of lockdown and now is the time for them to make plans for how their children can be looked after without us being on hand. There are calls being made for the government to fund local play schemes for children for the summer holidays, but at this moment nothing has been done and no further information has been forthcoming. For those parents who have been receiving our free school meals food hampers, the sad news is that these will also cease at the end of the summer term. Again, as with childcare, there is pressure for the government to continue with food vouchers but no statements updating schools about this have been given.

With regards to children returning to school in September, the sooner schools are informed of what is expected, the sooner we can plan for the return of all children into school. This has to start with a relaxation of social distancing rules for children so that we can fit more children into our classrooms. The relatively good news is that on 15th May Professor Whitty said that the rate of infection for COVID-19 was 2 to 3 in 1000 people. Between 25th May and 7th June the rate was reported to be 1 person in 1700 people - as Professor Whitty said last week, the epidemic is shrinking, but not fast. We still have quite a way to go and I only hope that relaxing the rules for people meeting together (not to mention the massed gatherings of protestors across the country) does not cause 'R' to rise above 1, because if it does, I cannot see any likelihood that schools will be in a position to open more fully.

Despite this last thought, my aim will be to start planning for a full return of pupils to school as quickly as possible in September since there will be a great deal to plan and prepare for so that we can welcome increased numbers of children back to school in a safe way.

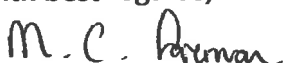
Rest assured, I will keep you fully informed of St Benet's responses to any announcements made by the government since it is the trustees of the academy trust who will have to agree with any plans that we have to open more fully.

On to other things. It is very hot today - thank goodness!!!! Unfortunately we have had some children come into school without drinks bottles, hats and sunscreen. (Coats obviously still need to be available for those downpours too!). Just a reminder that we have turned off all water fountains as they are a potential source of infection from the virus. Your child must bring in a water bottle that is freshly filled with water from home each day. If your child is likely to drink lots during the day, please make sure they have a second filled water bottle with them. Wearing fresh clean clothes every day is also essential - we advise you to get your child showered and clean as soon as they get home and for the clothes they have worn to school put in the wash straight away.

Google classroom - don't forget that if you and your child are having issues accessing Google Classroom please contact the school and we will talk to you about how we can support you with home learning.

A big well done to year 2 and their Bake Off - judged by a wonderful star of stage, screen and Bake Off - John Partridge! In joint third place were Niamh and Ruby, in second place was Theo and the overall winner with a fantastic creation of a dinosaur island was Leo . Well done to you all. As well as being our winner, Leo will receive a signed copy of John Partridge's most recent cookbook. We had an incredible number of entries and it was very, very difficult to judge so thank you once more to all our parents who supported their children with this exciting competition. I enjoyed looking at every single entry!!

With best regards,



Mary Foreman
Interim Headteacher