

Frequently Asked Questions (for parents) – planning towards a phased reopening of schools

Do schools have a choice about reopening?

Many of you will have seen a lot of media coverage about other UK nations keeping their schools closed and a large resistance from teaching unions about reopening schools at this time. At the moment schools are being asked to plan to reopen, but there is no guarantee it will go ahead on 1st June. Our Academy Trust has decided that in order to ensure that the opening of our schools is as safe as possible, no school will open before 8th June. School leaders are working hard to undertake rigorous risk assessments to determine if sufficient precautions can be implemented in the event of this planned phased reopening. We need to ensure that the premises are as safe they it can be, and that we have the suitable staffing for working with pupils, as well as looking at new routines and procedures. A decision about whether to open our school will be taken once all of these risk assessments have been completed, and reopening will only take place if the risk assessments indicate that it is safe to do so.

How safe will it be for pupils and staff?

Unfortunately, risks will remain for as long as there continues to be people testing positive in the UK, or until a vaccine is available. Our job as school leaders is to take every possible step to minimise risk by implementing the guidance provided from the DfE and our Academy Trust, including social distancing measures where possible, and strict cleaning protocols. The government currently has testing available for teachers and has stated they will extend this to children and family members who display any symptoms.

If my child is in Nursery, Reception, Yr 1 or Yr 6, do they have to attend school, and will I get fined if I don't send my child to school?

No, attendance is not compulsory for the remainder of this academic year. The DfE announced earlier in the pandemic that fines will not be issued for non-attendance. Therefore, parents must not feel pressured into sending their children back to school. This is a choice for you to make in the best interests of your children and your family.

What is the benefit to my child returning to school this academic year and what level of education will be provided during this time?

Children returning to school will receive education in key areas of learning in order to fill any gaps that may have arisen and help prepare them for their next stage of education. This will primarily be in English (Phonics and writing) and Maths. We will also complete well-being work and topic-based learning in the afternoon. Children will begin to acclimatise back into some semblance of routine and the purpose of leaving the house each day and interacting with people outside their home may help with children's emotional wellbeing.

What will the classroom look like?

We will remove soft furnishings where possible. Children will have their own set of equipment to use and tables will be spaced apart in order to support social distancing. In younger years if the teachers use carpet areas, the children will have a dedicated space to sit in. Staff will be encouraged to maintain distance from pupils where possible. We will continue to think very carefully about what resources we use in lessons to aid pupil's learning, and these will all be cleaned daily.

If my child does not attend, what are the arrangements for their education - how will home learning be provided if teachers are now working in classrooms?

Home learning will continue to be provided. There are some teachers who will not be in school and those who are will receive release time from their teaching commitments in order to help support their planning for both classroom work and online work. It is important to note that teachers will not be able to interact directly with parents as often as they may have been during recent weeks, as they will now be teaching full time in the classroom.

My child has an EHCP and usually receives 1:1 support in school; will they receive this if they return?

We will make every reasonable endeavour to ensure that children with 1:1 support continue to receive this. However, we cannot guarantee that support will be received from the member of staff that your child is accustomed to.

Can I withdraw my child at a later date if I feel it is not safe?

As mentioned previously, attendance is not compulsory so parents may remove their child/ren from school during this time if they wish to do so. We would however recommend that you speak with us in the first instance in case there is more we could do to alleviate your concerns. Having said that, the pandemic is an ever changing situation and there may be circumstances outside of our control that changes the way schools operate.

Will Breakfast & After School Club be open?

No, our school will only be open for teaching hours.

Will my child/ren still receive a bagel for breakfast?

We will still be providing bagels each morning but this will not be in its usual form. Once children in each bubble have arrived at school, they will be delivered bagels outside of their doors and will eat their bagels in their classroom.

Will my child be in their usual classroom, with their teacher and friends?

Unfortunately, we cannot guarantee this. The DfE have placed a temporary restriction on class sizes to 15 as a maximum. In some circumstances, due to the amount of space available, group size will need to be less than 15. This means that children could be in different classrooms with different teachers and children than they are used to. However, children will remain in their year groups and other factors such as different educational abilities and the children's ability to cope with change will all be taken into account wherever possible. However, it is important to note that for health and safety reasons there will be no consideration given to requests for children to change between 'bubbles'.

How will school manage social distancing?

We must be honest with parents that social distancing amongst primary age children will be difficult to manage, especially with the younger year groups. The government has determined the safest way to achieve this is for each class to become a "bubble" and these children, and the adults working with them, will stay together during the school day. There will be no opportunity for children to mix between class bubbles. Older children may be able to understand the importance of social distancing better and will be encouraged to keep 2m apart where appropriate.

Will my child need to bring their own pencil case?

No. Parents will be asked to send their child into school with no pencil case and no bookbag. Children should carry their water bottle with them but have nothing else in hand. This to avoid cross contamination between school and home. School lunches will be provided in the form of a packed lunch for the children to eat with their 'Bubble'.

Will the children be expected to wear uniform?

As soon as school returns to an educational establishment, normal uniform is required. If your child has outgrown their uniform and you cannot afford to replace this at the moment, please provide them with the best alternative you can. Uniforms should be washed daily.

Do the children need to wear face masks?

Government guidance states that children should not wear face masks to school.

What will happen if a child in school presents with symptoms of COVID-19?

If staff suspect that a child is presenting with symptoms of COVID-19, the child will be isolated in our medical room and parents will be called immediately to collect them. A member of staff will be allocated to look after this child while they wait for a parent to arrive and this member of staff will be provided with PPE. We will do our best not to alarm the children but we must ensure safety measures are put in place in these instances.

The government have now announced that children, and their families, will have access to testing from 1st June. We will ask parents in this situation to arrange a test for their child and to keep them at home until they receive their result. If the result is positive all children and adults in that bubble will self-isolate for 14 days.

Will we be told if someone in schools tests positive for COVID-19?

Yes, all parents will be notified. We always have the health and safety of all children at the forefront of our minds and this will allow parents to make decisions for their child with the relevant information.

How will the staff manage to look after my child if they become unwell or have an accident in school?

Our team will continue to look after your children in the usual way. They will comfort and care for children as always. Staff will be provided with PPE for intimate care.

Can parents come into school if we need to?

No, we must limit the number of visitors into school as much as possible. Parents should only come into the school building when it is absolutely necessary and only by appointment. We ask that you continue to communicate with us by email and telephone. If a meeting is required, only one parent should attend, and social distancing measures will need to be applied.

How will pupils know what to expect when they come in on the first day?

School will look and feel very different to what we are all used to, so we must be honest with pupils about what will happen. New rules and changes to daily routines, as outlined above and in our previous letter, will be discussed with them when they return to school, and pupils will continue to be reminded regularly of these expectations. Parents are encouraged to support us with this by discussing these changes with your child/ren at home prior to their return so that they have some understanding of what to expect.

My child is anxious about returning to school. What can I do to help them?

We recognise that some children are going to adapt well to their return to school and take things in their stride, while others may find this a very hard transition. The emotional wellbeing of our pupils is just as important as their education, so please continue to communicate with us if you have concerns about your child's wellbeing as we prepare to support them to return to school.