

22 May 2020

Dear Parents

Can I start by expressing our sincere and saddest condolences to all and each of our families and friends who have lost very close loved ones during this terrible Covid19 virus. We are really upset that for some of our children, life will not be the same again and it is our heartfelt intentions from everyone at LLMAT that we will always do our very best to support these children and their families in whatever way we can.

Thank you all for your support, patience and genuine care for us all. The ways many of you have shown gratitude to our staff has been very heart-warming and it is so reassuring to know how much you value their efforts. We cannot say how much this has meant to us and how this is keeping us going, particularly when we are having to make very difficult decisions on a daily basis.

I am really proud of our staff who have worked their hardest to make sure that your child's school has been a welcoming and happy place for the most vulnerable families and for children of our critical care workers during the whole lockdown. They have been marvellous. Our schools have remained open every day including all holidays and there has always provision for critical care and vulnerable children with adults they know every day. It does not go unnoticed that some of our leaders have not had a single day away from school as they have turned up every day for the last 9 weeks and have not even taken time to be on a rota to work from home since the start of lockdown. This sort of impressive dedication is the hallmark of LLMAT schools for which trustees and myself cannot overstate our gratitude.

During this period of reopening this same spirit of dedication and care will be evident in each of our four schools. Our most important principle within the intense planning and preparation we are making is that your children, who I can assure you are so precious to all of us, are able to be kept safe.

As a result, each school is now busy planning for a phased approach to reopening. Trustees are working alongside DFE guidance and Dudley LA to provide the most suitable approach to ensure we keep our staff and children safe. This is tricky because, as you know guidance changes on a daily basis. We are in Phase 4 and working towards Phase 3 of this virus and because of the unknown nature of this extraordinary situation we are taking extreme caution.

Our final plans for re-opening cannot be advised exactly until this time next week - a week is a long time for Covid 19.

Next Friday will produce an exact plan of dates for year groups and classes to return to school which will be based on the very latest government and LA guidance:

Here is what we do know:

- 1st June usual critical care workers and vulnerable children
all staff will be in to rehearse and check their working knowledge of the risk assessment and to plan
- 2nd – 5th June possible restart of some Year 6 children groups only

The first week back is not open to children in Reception or Year 1. Due to space issues it is unlikely that we can plan for our Nursery classes to restart within June.

Safety in our school environments

- each school has had a full deep clean during lockdown
- each school is undergoing a Legionella test next week to ensure that there is no risk of infection in our water systems before any return is fully communicated
- we have employed extra cleaning hours in each and every school and there will be a cleaner on site perpetually cleaning (complete with the advised safety protection) during each morning, lunchtime and afternoon session and normal cleaning is retained either before or after school on top of this
- cleaning will ensure that all equipment used, particularly resources for our youngest children, are cleaned each day and before any different group of children can have contact with it
- older children will use only their own writing equipment and this will be provided on their own identified desks for their classroom sessions
- each school has a comprehensive risk assessment which takes into account the different context of each school and all staff will have rehearsed and be full briefed before any children returns to school.
- each school has put in place one-way systems where this is physically possible
- each classroom has been measured and laid out to retain the 2m social distancing which means that in none of our schools can we accommodate class groups of anything larger than 12
- each school has a plan for entry and exit of children which maintains the greatest opportunity for maintaining social distancing
- all schools will use flexible start and finish times to lessen the number of parents on site at a time
- there will be a robust system in place to send home individuals if they have even the slightest symptom and a plan for isolation of whole groups if needed
- there will not be any assemblies, performances or afterschool clubs.
- no parent or visitor is allowed into the school building so email and phone communication is to be used to talk with families in each school

Schools will not look the same from the 1st June 2020 - these are some of the many requirements already in place:

- children will be taught in groups of 12 maximum (this means that they may not be with their class teacher or all of their friends or even in their classroom) and they may be taught at times by a teaching assistant
- children will be expected to remain within the same group (the Government often refer to this as their 'bubble') and this will be in class and at lunch and playtimes, they will not be able to mix with other 'bubbles'.
- in order to keep every child safe, they will be expected to remain in their particular 'zone' of the school – all children will be trained in knowing this
- children will not necessarily be in school full time – in order for all children to be in school in groups of around 10 our schools would need between 42 – 63 classrooms!
- all staff will work normal hours
- there will be staggered start and finish times for different groups of children and this will be different in each school according to entry doors and classroom proximity
- where weather allows, children will spend time outside as long as it is safe which might include eating their lunch and this will be in their zones.
- all children will require very clearly labelled lunch boxes and they will be the only one allowed to touch it
- there will be an expectation of very increased and frequent hand washing and in every session
- lunch and break time will be staggered for every class to keep 2m social distancing possible
- the curriculum and learning activities will be very different for the children.as all soft toys, cushions, wooden toys etc have been removed
- the sharing of reading books will be very carefully managed with covers wiped and time gaps before any exchange.

The Trustees are keen that you know that we are keeping all plans under review every day of this next week and we are listening to all professional advice in making decisions. We will continue to consider all of the points raised in the government's documentation and how best to manage them.

We will keep everyone as safe as we possibly can in these uncertain times.

I am aware that the decision to return your child to school is deeply personal. Whilst we are being extremely measured to make sure your child is safe when they do return and whilst we are encouraging you to consider it, you are entitled to keep them at home, without fining or actions from the school or the Trust.

We are all very excited that we are beginning to have a plan to return to some form of new normality as we have missed being with your children – it is our core purpose. We do feel very uncomfortable with the idea that we cannot open our doors to every child. We always strive to provide equality of opportunity for everyone so this does go against our values and beliefs, but, in the current situation we have to do everything we can to keep people safe.

Warmest Regards

Claire Thompson
Acting CEO