



East Dale Road
Melton, North Ferriby
East Yorkshire, HU14 3HS
Tel: 01482 636716

enquiries@theeducationalliance.org.uk
theeducationalliance.org.uk

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Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to you again with an update and I want to focus on the issue of schools “reopening” that is being widely debated in the media. I hope to provide you here with really clear information about where we are, the planning we are doing and hopefully provide some honest reassurance and some balance to some of the more extreme statements and articles that have appeared over the last few days.

Firstly, I would like to be clear that our schools have never shut. Since 23 March, when most pupils were told to stay home by the government, all six of our schools have continued to operate. We have welcomed young people whose parents/carers are key workers or who are considered to be in a more vulnerable group. Pupils have been in school 2087 times, including through what would have been Easter holidays and on three bank holidays. Our teachers and staff have not stopped working. They have looked after pupils in school, set online work, assessed work, phoned every pupil and parent in every school, bought and distributed free school meal vouchers, provided laptops, produced and developed packs of printed work, undertaken voluntary online CPD to develop new skills around remote learning, co-ordinated huge community volunteer work and many other things.

They have done this against a background of all of the concerns we all have about the health of friends and family, juggling their own childcare and so on. I am enormously grateful for everything our school staff continue to do and am incredibly proud of them and of our profession. I do not know a single member of staff who does not desperately wish pupils to come back into school as soon as it is safe so we can work with them face to face. This is why we chose to work in schools and we really miss our pupils.

There is little doubt that for all pupils across the country, learning from home is never going to be as good as learning face-to-face in schools. We know that we will need to help pupils catch up on lost learning and that some pupils will need more catching up than others. We know how to do this, we will do this and we will ensure our pupils get the best schooling possible. Over the next few weeks and months, our primary responsibility is to ensure we keep pupils, staff and families as safe as we can and continue to support the national effort against the Coronavirus. We are working every day to plan for bringing more pupils back to school safely as soon as we can.

To be very clear, the government has said “We anticipate, with further progress, that we may be able, from the week commencing 1 June 2020 to welcome back more children”. The government has asked schools to prioritise reception, followed by Year 1 and then Year 6 in primary school. Secondary schools have been asked to try to offer “some face-to-face support for year 10 and year 12”. In addition, all schools are asked to continue to offer full time provision to “priority” children (i.e. children of key workers and those considered more “vulnerable”).



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Our job now is to plan for how to do this in a way that allows us to reduce risks as much as we can and then be honest with parents, pupils and staff what we believe the level of risk to be. You should expect to be able to ask, "How safe is it?" it to be given a full and honest answer. We are doing everything we can to be able to answer that question as fully as possible.

The government has provided some guidance to schools on how we might operate in primary schools. No specific guidance has yet been provided for secondary schools. We can share with you what the guidance says about what school will look like for pupils who come back in.

In primary schools, the government has made it very clear that social distancing in the way we all understand it (i.e. remaining 2 metres apart at all times) is simply not possible. Instead, schools are asked to reduce risks by grouping pupils into classes/pods (sometimes called bubbles) of around 15 pupils and preventing pupils in one pod mixing with pupils in another pod. This will mean separate lunchtimes, separate breaks and staggered start and finish times. Each pod will need two members of staff, its own room and its own equipment. Within the pod, pupils will be required to practice good hygiene and we will ensure there is additional cleaning. It is less clear what secondary provision might look like. We await guidance, but it is clear that if 2 metre social distancing is required, the capacity for group size will be smaller than in primary due to constraints around classroom size (once our larger spaces have been used).

There is a great deal of important information we do not yet have, most importantly the scientific evidence that SAGE has used in its consideration of the issue of schools. It is vital schools are given this information as soon as possible. We need to be in a position where we can have an honest dialogue with parents, pupils and staff about what measures we have put in place, why they are in place and how safe we feel our schools are for pupils, staff and families.

We will do everything we can to be open and honest with you. We will give you all the information we have and try to explain our thinking as clearly as possible. We hope that this will be more helpful than some of the discourse going on in some areas, often from people who have no understanding of how seriously school leaders and staff are taking our responsibilities as public servants.

As ever, I wish you and your families the very best. We will write again before the end of the week with what we hope will be some more detailed plans about how we might phase our increased capacity over the coming weeks.

Yours faithfully

Jonny Uttley
CEO



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