

Dear Parents / Carers

Before I relay our plans for the next phase, I just want to take some time to thank you for everything you have been doing so far. All of you have had to grapple with home learning but as you know, education is far more than curriculum. It is social, it is behavioural, it is certainly emotional and it is very difficult to do from your kitchen table day in day out.

Many of you have felt the responsibility of taking this all on, together with juggling your family and jobs. What you have done will be enough. If they are safe and they are happy and they are fed, you will have done your job.

When our schools are fully operational we will support them emotionally and socially, we will help through the times they have had and we will not only help them catch up, but they will thrive again. We will move forward stronger and more resilient than before to face this brave new world. Thank you for sticking with us.

As you will have seen in the media and from our own updates, we are now preparing to increase the number of children in our schools from just key workers and vulnerable children to those in Nursery, Reception, Y1 and Y6.

We fundamentally believe that the best place for the children to be is in school with their friends and teachers. However, we are only prepared to do so in a way that is safe. Safe for the children and their families and for our staff and their families at home too.

The advice on this, as you will have seen, is conflicted. There is advice and strong opposition from doctors, medical experts and unions and then there is the advice from the government. If we as school leaders do not have all the facts and are faced with extremely difficult decisions, then we absolutely understand that parents and carers will also now be faced with difficult decisions.

We have found the best way we can to open our schools from June 1st for more children whilst keeping them as safe as possible.

It is YOUR choice if you want to send your children back in to school and your choice if you want to keep them at home. Every family will have different needs and pressures and we will respect them. Nobody will be forced to return to school - unless we felt that by not doing so was unsafe - and no family, parent or career will be judged for the decision they make for their family. We will continue to support, as best we can, both families at home and families in school and try to make their education as fair and as effective as it can be.

In order to help inform our plans we have asked all of our parents in these first four age groups whether they would prefer their children to attend school or not. The response, as you can imagine, was very mixed. Families need different things at the moment and these will be subject to change.

As a result, we have developed the following principles to guide our decisions:

- Children will return only from the year groups indicted by the government to help those children who need to be in school.

- We will keep our online learning in place for those who need to stay at home.
- Key worker and vulnerable families will be prioritised and resources be available so that we can allow space for as many as need it.

Here are some other facts:

- In most schools we do not have enough classrooms or staff to have all required year groups - in split classes - in school at once and offer places for key worker and vulnerable families.
- None of our schools has a full complement of staff due to shielding, isolation and illness.
- All schools, with which we have engaged locally, are offering a version of this split timetable model.
- Most of our schools will operate a split week timetable with 4 social bubbles for each year group.

In most schools each year group of 60 will be split into 4 groups. Each group will have up to 15 children. Two groups will attend on a Monday and Tuesday. The other two on a Thursday and Friday. Wednesday will be used for cleaning between groups, planning for in school and remote working for those children still at home.

We will do our best to ensure that friendships are taken into account. Only the siblings in eligible year groups can attend and where this is the case we will make sure they attend on the same day.

The parents of key worker children and those classed as vulnerable will be given the choice for the pupils to **either** attend every day, as they are now, in the key worker groups **or** with their year group as part of the split week timetable. We cannot do both due to the guidance around social bubbles. If a child in the bubble tests positive for COVID19 the entire bubble – including staff – will be sent home for 14 days. If a child is in two bubbles then they will both have to be sent home.

This model gives us the chance to establish social bubbles and effective cleaning routines between them. Our pupils can be in school for some time every week so we can keep in contact, rebuild relationships and support learning effectively. It also allows us to cope where staff are shielded or ill.

Finally, it allows us to introduce more children and adults in a careful manner before the end of term. There have been no easy decisions to make during this pandemic and I want to thank you all for the support you continue to show as we take these steps together.

Please do not hesitate to contact your school if there is something of which you are unsure and we will continue to update you with more information as it becomes available.

Mr Gary Evans
 Chief Executive Officer
 The Blue Kite Academy Trust