



Thameside Primary School

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Dear parents and carers,

I am sure that you are aware that last week, the Secretary of State for Education finally clarified the government's position regarding the full opening of primary schools for a month before the end of term. He has accepted that most schools (particularly primaries) do not have the capacity, in terms of both physical space and teachers, to welcome back all students, but went on to say that if schools do have capacity, then government would like them to accommodate the return of more children before the end of the summer term.

Following this statement, I immediately sought clarification from the local authority about how much flexibility that means we have as a school to plan for a wider opening to more year groups i.e. years 2 to 5. I have been advised by the local authority to wait for written guidance from the government to be released before making any further plans. I appreciate how frustrating it is for the children in Years 2-5 to still not know what their return date is likely to be. As you know, we still would like nothing better than to see all of our children safe and happy back in their classrooms. Our ambition would be to provide these children with at least one transition day before the summer holidays but I need to make parents aware that this is reliant on government guidance and the many factors that we as a school have to implement.

These include:

1. Having classes of a maximum of 15 children with 2 adults per group.
2. Ensuring that classroom layouts support social distancing and children are not permitted to mix with other bubbles at break times.
3. Ensuring bubbles have their own designated toilets.
4. Ensuring there are enough staff in school to be able to teach each group of children.
5. Supporting those staff who are currently shielding.
6. Ensuring there are enough areas in school for groups to be able to access. For example, children are eating in their classes and the use of playgrounds and outside areas is on a rota system.
7. Above all we have to prioritise places for children whose parents fall under the critical worker category, those who are deemed to be vulnerable for example children with an EHC plan or who have an allocated social worker. Other vulnerable children can include those on the edge of social care or those that have been adopted.
8. Priority year groups are still nursery, reception, years 1 and 6.

In the last few months we have been asked to respond, usually at very short public notice, to circumstances we could scarcely have imagined as we entered into 2020. Over the past few weeks, we have been tasked with the complete redesign and reorganisation of our classrooms and other learning spaces in school to ensure it was safe for a phased return of Years R, 1 and 6. It is thanks to our amazing staff that our red, yellow, purple and blue bubbles have been so successful these last few weeks.



As a staff, we all feel concerned for the children who remain at home. We know that the vast majority have been keeping up with their learning at home, but this can never replace the experience of physically being at school and learning with their friends.

As yourselves, I await the next announcement from government to find out what arrangements for September will be. Thankfully, the number of new infections and deaths from Covid19 continue to fall almost daily at present, so we are hopeful that September may bring the opportunity for a normal start to the school year but we can only, like you, keep our fingers crossed at this stage.

As soon as government guidance is released and subsequent decisions are made by staff and governors about the wider opening of our school to other year groups, I will of course communicate our plans to you.

Thank you for your support over the past couple of months; your emails of encouragement, cards and carbohydrate themed gifts have made a very difficult situation much more manageable and ensured we have kept the sense of belonging alive at Thameside whilst keeping safe and healthy.

Please contact the school office or myself by email if there is anything you feel we can do to help you further at this stage.

Yours sincerely,

Sophie Greenaway



Headteacher

