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Dear Parents

I wanted to write to you as CEO of the Durham Diocesan MAT to explain some more about the approach the Trust is taking following the government announcements on Sunday night regarding the wider re-opening of schools. Additional detailed guidance was issued on Monday which answers some, but not all, questions.

My preference as CEO is for all of our DDMAT schools to find a way of re-opening to our children but our first priority has to be that this is done in the safest way possible whilst enabling our schools to manage with their current staffing levels and space available. We are working closely with our Health and Safety advisors to carry out detailed risk assessments and plan in line the guidance issued to consider areas such as:

- Classes should be no more than 15 pupils, however in many of our schools the class sizes will need to be far lower due to space and number of staff available
- Classes once set should remain together in the same class throughout the day; this should be with the same teacher wherever possible
- Staggered break and lunch times
- Staggered use of areas such as the hall
- Continued regular hand washing and cleaning of the school during the day

What is very clear is that any return to school will not be what our children are used to and they will need support to understand this. You will know from the government announcements that the ambition is to open from 1 June if the science supports this. **We are taking the decision to close all of our schools at half term to ensure that staff are given a proper break before this wider re-opening starts.**

From 1 June, as well as the continued attendance of the children of key workers and vulnerable children, the aim is for Nursery, Reception, Y1 and Y6 to begin to attend their school again initially. The government guidance is clear that the earlier years are the priority years so our schools are being asked to look at prioritising these groups first (after key workers and vulnerable children) when considering how many children they can safely accommodate in school. This means we are likely to be looking at a phased approach with the first week of re-opening (w/c 1 June) being for key workers/vulnerable children/nursery and reception, the second week (w/c 8 June) also for year 1 (provided we have managed week 1) and the third week for year 6 (w/c 15 June). This means that schools will need to continue to assess numbers in school in line with their risk assessments and does unfortunately mean for some schools they may not be able to proceed to re-open to year 6 or even to year 1 if numbers in the lower years mean they have reached their safe capacity. Your school will keep in

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touch with you about this and is already taking steps to understand likely numbers in school to enable them to plan as far as possible.

The planning process is complicated and we are currently working through social distancing guidelines with our Health and Safety advisors to consider issues such as break and lunch time, children with specific learning support needs, entry and exit from school site, toilet access and arrangements and movement around school. We have also considered the use of PPE and, whilst the government guidance is clear that face masks are not recommended for staff or pupils, we will have appropriate PPE available in the event of anyone showing symptoms so that staff can safely deal with the situation. Our schools will also be looking at adjusting curriculums and will be focussing on ensuring your children's wellbeing and mental health is a priority upon return to school as they transition from learning from home.

I hope this helps to explain the amount of unknowns that we are attempting to deal with during this planning phase. We are hoping for additional government guidance later this week to further help us plan. I would also encourage you to read the guidance for parents and carers which you can access [here](#).

Your school will continue to keep you updated as we know more. However, as a parent myself, I fully understand what a very difficult and anxious time this is for parents, staff and children. I wanted to reassure you that we are doing all we can to prepare for the possible wider re-opening of our schools and that we will only do this when we are confident that we can do so safely.

Best wishes



**Paul Rickeard**  
**Chief Executive Officer**  
**Durham Diocesan MAT**