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Dear Parents and Carers

As our schools prepare for wider opening I just wanted to explain some of the changes you and your children will experience coming back into our buildings.

As you know, the vast majority of our schools have never closed. All staff have been involved since lockdown in preparing work for children and supporting vulnerable children and children of Key workers in particular, those who have needed child care. As we move forwards we will no longer be offering the same model and school timings will need to change. We will not for example be able to offer 'wrap around' childcare to any of our children from the 1st June. So where schools have previously offered extended opening times (usually of 8am-5pm) this will no longer be the case as we need to ensure children remain in consistent small groups (or 'bubbles') with the same staff in line with government guidance.

Start times and end times of the school day will be staggered and ALL TRUST SCHOOLS will close from 2pm on a Friday to allow the buildings to be thoroughly cleaned. This will also give staff a chance to prepare work for the following week. Usually staff would have time to do this in the school day, however as we need a consistent member of staff with each group this is the only time we can allocate for staff to plan. I am immensely proud of how our staff teams have worked so hard and have gone above and beyond what is usually expected.

I must stress the importance of collecting children **promptly at the end of the school day** and making sure you are keeping to your **allotted time of arrival**. Drop off and collection of our children has been specifically planned in line with our risk assessments and will follow usual school opening times. Please also bear in mind a number of our schools are in housing estates where again we have concerned residents who have asked us to remind parents about social distancing. We would suggest only one person collects and or drops off a child at school.

Over the last few weeks, our Health and Safety Team have been working with school leaders to determine the maximum number of children we can safely accommodate on site. This has included measuring classroom spaces; checking levels of ventilation and moving furniture out of rooms that is difficult to clean. The majority of our schools will be full to their safe capacity as identified under their bespoke risk assessments relatively quickly – we cannot deploy additional buildings overnight. Where one of our

schools reaches capacity we will be working with the Local Authority to prioritise space for any eligible children who we are unable to accommodate in other schools.

Parents who are key/critical workers and who have requested 'sessions' as opposed to full time cover over the least 8 weeks will now need to decide if children are coming into school **full time** or not taking a place. We can no longer operate a 'rota' for children. I ask that you inform your school as soon as possible, and in any event by Friday 22 May, if you would like a full time place for your child (if you are a key/cirtical worker) as once we start wider reopening, we may not be able to accommodate your child due to limited capacity, as further groups of children become eligible for return to school. Similarly if your child is in an eligible year group and does not take up their place at the point which it is offered there may not be a place available in later weeks.

Following careful consideration we are currently working towards a staged approach as follows from after half term (this all depends on the government decision on whether the science supports the wider re-opening which we understand is due to take place on 28 May):-

w/c 1 June- open to key/critical worker and vulnerable children only so as to properly assess accurate numbers taking up their full time place in this group
w/c 8 June- addition of Nursery (if applicable) and Reception children
w/c 15 June, addition of Year 1 (if possible in line with risk assessments and capacity)
w/c 22 June- addition of Year 6 (if possible in line with risk assessments and capacity)

The wider re-opening of school is in line with that suggested by the Department for Education in their guidance on the wider re-opening of schools. However, this proposal will be under constant review and may need to be revised depending on government guidance, local risk assessments and context. We will keep you informed as far as possible of changes as they arise. Unfortunately, if a school reaches their capacity under their risk assessment, this may mean they cannot open to all eligible year groups (taking into consideration size of buildings, corridors, toilet facilities and staff who are able to attend work).

Sadly, school will look very different to those children who are returning. Children returning to school may not be with their usual class teacher for instance, as a number of our Trust staff are 'shielding' so cannot come back to school yet. There is a limit as to how many children can be in a group (or bubble as the government refer to them) and staffing has to be adjusted accordingly. It maybe your child is with a Teaching Assistant as opposed to a teacher; however, an adjusted curriculum is being designed that is focussing on mental health, wellbeing and relationships. When children come back to school after any form of extended break there is a time of settling in a school – there will need to be a period where we adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of our children in our unique settings.

The Government's campaign that has changed from 'stay at home' to 'stay alert' is also key in how successful this transition will be. Our school staff are understandably anxious about the risks associated with the extended opening of schools and I hope that all of our families will continue to follow the government guidance in full to protect our staff and school family. For example social distancing and not meeting up in groups of more than two with anyone from another household.

Our schools will have access to PPE but this will only be used in the event of a child displaying symptoms of Covid19. I must stress that if your child is displaying symptoms they **must self-isolate** in line with government guidance. Remember the current list of symptoms are:-

High Temperature
New, continuous cough
Loss or change to sense of smell or taste

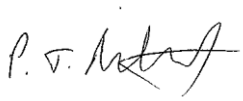
Please also ensure you do not send your child to school for 14 days if anyone in your household has had any of the above symptoms.

We do not want children returning to school to be wearing face coverings as our staff will not be doing so unless these is a defined need and we are concerned that these could easily be lost or mixed up with other children (despite I am sure our best efforts).

Over the coming days and weeks our school leaders will be in direct contact with all of you. Please make sure you read all communications carefully as they will contain vital information concerning the operation of your child's school. All of the above is subject to change in light of government guidance. As a Trust, we will follow the guidance as closely as we can with the health, safety and wellbeing of our children and staff being paramount at all times.

Thank you again for your patience and support during this challenging time.

Yours sincerely



Paul Rickeard
Chief Executive Officer
Durham Diocesan MAT