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Dear Parents and Carers,

As our schools will shortly be closing for the summer holidays I just wanted to thank you again for your patience and support throughout this pandemic and take the opportunity to inform you of how we will be moving forwards in September.

As you will know the government has now published a significant amount of new guidance for schools which will apply from September. We have now reviewed this guidance with our schools and they are working through this with our Health and Safety advisors. Your school will provide you with further specific information about how your school will return in September including possible adaptations to start and finish times and instructions as to how you can help to ensure the environment is as safe as possible for our children and staff when they return.

I am sure you will agree that one of the most encouraging aspects of the new guidance is that **from September ALL children should be back in school**. With this in mind we have looked at our curriculum in every school and asked our leaders to focus on a period of 'settling in' for the children and time to reflect upon the period that has gone before us. All of us in some shape or form will have been affected by the pandemic and, as a Trust, we want to make sure we can support you and your child as best as we can. I realise for some of you there will be a level of anxiety about your child coming back to school and, as a parent, I fully understand this. However, I can reassure you that our schools are committed to following the guidance for September carefully and fully supporting your children in their return.

During the period of COVID the Trust has worked behind the scenes to support all of our schools at many different levels. Our main focus and priority however, has been keeping your children and our staff safe. We are grateful to our Leaders and staff who have worked closely with our Health and Safety Team to ensure we have properly and confidently assessed the risks in all of our schools and this will continue when your children return to school in September.

Sadly when we return it is clear there will still be 'risk'. People will still have COVID and the risk of transmission of the virus will still exist. Our commitment to you is that we will communicate with you promptly and clearly if we have a concern, however, we need a commitment from you that you will act swiftly and in accordance with the guidance if we are worried about your child. We will need you to ensure that if your child is showing symptoms of COVID that they are isolated and tested as quickly as possible. We will inform public health England of every child that we send home with symptoms to ensure the Track and Trace System is ready to alert others should a test return as positive. We are waiting

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for confirmation that we will be given testing kits in school to issue to families of children who show symptoms to help speed the process up.

We acknowledge that as we return there will be other bugs and viruses that are not COVID but manifest themselves in a similar way. Please understand and bear with us – if their symptoms are the same as COVID we will ask you to seek a test and your child will have to be isolated until the outcome of that test is known. I realise this will be frustrating however, we have to protect our staff and other children.

In the event of a possible further 'lockdown' all of our schools will be able to switch to an online learning platform or learning packs. Like many others we have learned a great deal throughout this period about what works and what doesn't so our aim is to ensure that resources will be available that are in line with the curriculum that would have been offered in school.

I hope and pray that you have a happy and safe summer break. Like you we have never experienced anything quite like this before and I think staff in our schools are in desperate need of some time to rest and recuperate. We look forward to welcoming you back in September and will of course keep in contact should anything change before then.

Yours sincerely



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