



ST MARY'S CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Mill Street, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 2TH

Telephone: 01384 818435

Website: www.st-mary-bh.dudley.sch.uk



Archdiocese of Birmingham

Principal: Ms O. O'Beirne

22nd May 2020

Dear Parents/carers,

We hope you are all keeping well, are staying safe and we thank you for your continued support and good wishes during this difficult time. We miss our young people very much and look forward to a time when our wonderful school community can be fully together again.

In the meantime, however, the purpose of this letter is to inform you of the Multi Academy Company (MAC) response to the government's plans for a phased reopening to the wider school community. We are keen to keep clear and frequent communication with you all and, in response to your requests for more information about what our schools will look like during this period, we attempt, in this letter, to capture some of the many questions you have posed to date.

The first reassurance is that sending your child back to school at this time will be YOUR choice and there will be NO penalties for non-attendance. We will let you know if the government's position on school attendance changes.

Please be aware that school will operate very differently from the way it has operated previously. You will have heard the government's plans to begin a phased return to school of more pupils from 1st June 2020 at the earliest. Given the level of planning and changes to the school environment that need to be put in place in order to reduce the risk of infection to children, staff and you at home, we are not able to do this until the earliest date of Tuesday 2nd June and even then it will not be for all the chosen year groups at the same time.

As we are sure you can appreciate, social distancing in a school is a huge challenge – we will make every effort to put social distancing measures in place, but we certainly cannot guarantee it and the guidance from the government recognises that social distancing cannot be maintained at all times, especially with younger children.

Who does this apply to?

The phased return applies to Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 only. However, if all the children returned at once we would have well in excess of 110 children in school, supported by a large number of staff. The government has made it clear that it is up to schools to decide what is safe and manageable and we are concerned that if all Nursery, Reception, Year 1, Year 6, key worker children and vulnerable pupils return at the same time it will make it difficult to keep everyone safe when trying to adhere to the social distancing of 2m, especially while we are all adjusting to the new rules.

Part of Saint Nicholas Owen Catholic Multi Academy Company.

A Private Limited Company with charitable status. Registered in England and Wales Company No 09174154

Registered Office: Hagley Catholic High School, Brake Lane, Hagley, Worcestershire DY8 2XL

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The MAC has taken the decision to prioritise Year 6, in the first instance, and as part of our first phase of re-opening, as we know that the older children are more likely to understand and comply with the new arrangements more successfully than our very youngest children. Therefore, we plan, subject to being able to satisfy all the safety checks and having the necessary staff available, to open our schools to our Year 6 children from 2 June. Please note, however, that if we are not ready to reopen to our Year 6 children by 2 June, we will extend this timescale for re-opening until we are certain that we have met all the requirements of our risk assessments and will keep you informed if the date for welcoming back Year 6 pupils changes.

We will review this initial pilot over a period of two weeks and will then communicate further with you regarding admitting pupils from other year groups as the situation becomes clearer.

What will it look like?

Children will be sorted into what the government is calling 'bubbles' – meaning they will be with up to 6/9 other children and an adult. As far as possible the class teacher or teaching assistant can only be in one 'bubble' and the 'bubbles' cannot mix at all. The school will decide on the 'bubbles'. Not all children will be with their class teacher or their friends and they will have to try to remain at least 2 metres from others at all times. This is necessary so that any outbreak of the virus can be tracked and traced and those people who have been in the affected 'bubble' can isolate and be tested. The bubbles are small in order to achieve 2m social distancing.

Some furniture will have to be removed from classes, movement systems around the classroom and school need to be set up and systems for use of toilets and cleaning all worked out.

Lunches will be eaten in 'bubbles' in the classrooms and will have to be either: a paid-for school grab bag, a free school meal grab bag or home packed lunch. There will be no hot meal provision. Children will need to bring in their own healthy snack for break times.

Desks will be 2 metres apart and a walkway will be included –please see pictures below so you can see what a class will look like. Children will have to remain at their desks and keep to their own equipment. Outside play/learning will also be socially distanced.





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The returning Year6 pupils will have a four day week, from Monday to Thursday, although we will keep this under review. This is to ensure that staff can stay with their 'bubbles' to minimise the risk of infection. Staff will, therefore, have their statutory Planning Preparation and Assessment time on a Friday. The school will, however, continue to open to vulnerable and keyworker children on a Friday. These children will remain in their 'bubble' in their designated area of the school. We will contact the parents/carers of vulnerable pupils in Year 6 separately to discuss what is best for your child.

We will need to stagger drop off times. You will also need to adhere to 2m distance when dropping off/collecting your children. We are aware that the youngest children may find this very difficult. They will not have access to all the usual practical resources they normally would because they need to be kept clean to avoid infection. Young children learn by touching, doing, being with others and sharing – all of which will have to be limited as far as possible as we adjust to a new way of learning.

Next Steps

We have already sent out some exploratory surveys to gain an understanding of what you might choose to do. As soon as we have further information from the government and we have made a decision as to how we are going to roll out the phased return we will be sending out a booking form via a link on the school website for you to confirm if your child will be attending school. The Year 6 booking forms will be sent to parents by 10am today, Friday 22nd May. Please respond by return as we need to know firm numbers before we can plan further. If you initially decide not to send your child but then want to change your mind, please contact the school via email and Mrs Borriello will send you a form. Please do not send your child to school without letting us know first so that we can ensure that we have suitable arrangements in place for all pupils who are returning.

Clinically Vulnerable or clinically extremely vulnerable individuals

- If your child has been classed as clinically vulnerable, you should follow medical advice about whether your child can return to school. Please notify the school if your medical advisor recommends that any additional steps are taken for your child to return to school.
- If your child lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable, the Government guidance states that your child can still return to school.
- If your child is clinically extremely vulnerable and has been advised to shield, they are not expected to return to school and we will support them to work from home. Again, please notify the school if your child falls into this category.
- If your child lives with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable, the Government guidance states that they can only return to school if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and

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they are able to understand and follow those instructions. Please inform the school if your household (or any other households your child lives in) falls into this category so that we can discuss whether your child can return to school or if they should stay at home.

For further information about who is classed as clinically vulnerable and clinically extremely vulnerable, please visit: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid19/people-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/whos-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>

Pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

If your child has an EHCP, the latest government guidance states that attendance at school is expected where it is determined, following a local authority led risk assessment, that their needs can be as safely or more safely met in the education environment. We will, therefore, be writing to the parent of any child with an EHCP separately to confirm the specific arrangements for your child's return to school.

Vulnerable and key worker children

We will continue to open every day to vulnerable and key worker children and priority will continue to be given to these cohorts of children. Places for Year 6 pupils will be allocated after this. This may mean that, due to 'bubble' sizes and the capacity in school, we may be unable to offer places to some Year 6 children. In addition, there may be times when we may have to cancel a class if there are staff shortages.

We will try to make the experience as positive as possible and recognise that children will be anxious - the small groups will help with this. We will continue to provide home learning and checking in with you regularly. What we do ask is that if you decide that your child will return then they do so on a full-time basis, as too many changes will make organisation very difficult.

Once you have booked a place with us for the return of your Year 6 child, we will follow up shortly afterwards with a further letter confirming the place and outlining procedures and protocols.

Thank you for the time you have given to reading this and for your continued support – we appreciate that it is a difficult decision to decide what to do with your most precious of gifts – your children.

With every good wish

God Bless



Principal

Suzanne Horan

Catholic Senior Executive Leader