



Lanchester E.P. (Cont.) Primary School

A Caring Community Where All Can Flourish



Tuesday 12th May 2020

Dear Parents/Carers,

I seem to be writing to you quite regularly at the moment – and none of it is easy to write or makes for easy reading either! Today, I am writing this letter from my heart. Some of it you may not agree with or like to read.... however, I cannot apologise for this. I feel strongly that I need to be totally honest with you all. This is without a doubt the hardest letter I have written in my whole teaching career.

Announcements

I am sure you, like me, have been listening very eagerly to the Prime Minister's announcements this week and trying to make sense of it all. I am going to be very honest with you in this letter and try to avoid being political – although it is tricky at the moment.

I have been Head Teacher of this wonderful school for the last 15 years and during this time, I have been in the privileged position of looking after other people's children, leading groups of dedicated, committed staff and being at the heart of an amazing community. This has taught me all sorts, but there are two things in particular that I have learnt. The first is to always be completely truthful and honest with parents and carers. The second is, when it comes to children, to always consider the worst-case scenario.

You have had access to all the announcements and guidance at exactly the same time as me. We have been asked, where possible, to try to open our schools again in just over 2 weeks and to stagger the start and finish times, stagger playtimes and lunchtimes, half the class sizes, organise children into smaller groups, keep them in those smaller groups for the whole time they are in school, not allow these groups of children to mix and to encourage social distancing with the children. This advice from the Government raises a number of extremely challenging issues.

We are all desperate for the children and staff to be back in school. I imagine that many of you are at the end of your tether – I realise that. You too want your child to be back in school. Your child wants to be back in school. We all want to be back to normal – but this is not going to be going back to school as normal for your child.

Social Distancing in Schools

I feel I need to share a fact with you – there is no such thing as social distancing in a school, however hard we will try. The reason why childhood illnesses spread so quickly in schools is because we are in contact with each other all of the time. I am sometimes asked by parents to keep children apart from each other – I can put children at opposite ends of different classrooms and they are like magnets – they are drawn to each other. It does not matter how many times we tell children to keep apart or away from each other – they physically cannot do it and this is just part of being a child – they are not being naughty – they are just being children.

Opening the School Doors

When we open the doors of our school again, it will be a very different environment and experience for the children. We need to have small classes of no more than 15. This means that some children will have a change of teacher and teaching assistant responsible for them. They will be segregated and shielded from the rest of the children in school. They may be in a different classroom to the one they are used to. They will have their own playtime, their own lunchtime and their own start and finish time. They will have their own equipment and stationery. They will not be able to share with others. Many of the activities they are used to accessing, such as water play, sand and playdough for the younger children, cannot be available. If a child or an adult in their group contracts the virus, the whole group will be sent home to self-isolate for 14 days.

School Ethos

Another concern I have is that the overarching ethos of our school is centred around care and compassion. When children are upset we comfort them, we hug them. Sadly, we are not going to be able to do this which goes against every grain of our being. The thought of a child being anxious about coming into school and not being able to put my arm round them, hold their hand to guide them in, allow parents to come into the building to settle them goes against everything I stand for as a caring head teacher.

Parental Opinions

There will be some of you who feel that it is important that the children return to school without delay. I respect that – we will all have differing opinions on this, I'm sure. However, what worries me is that there is only the possibility that things will be ok – that's all we have at the moment. I believe 'ok' is not good enough when it comes to the precious gift that is your child. The worst-case scenario for me is that a child in our care will contract the virus.

I apologise if you think I am being negative – I am not doing this deliberately – I am just trying to be very honest and upfront with you all.

Our Intentions

However, despite having said all of this, we are being asked to try and open our school and we will aim to do this – just as we have kept the school open for children of key workers for the last 2 months. I hope you know us well enough by now to know that we will do our utmost to ensure the safety of all children in our care and to give them the best experience possible. There is still a huge amount of work to do behind the scenes with risk assessments and planning.

To help us with our preparations, we will be emailing a form later in the week to parents of children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 asking you if you would like your child to access school from 1st June 2020. This is totally optional – there is no pressure on any parent or carer to send their child into school. The staff will continue to provide online work to be completed at home for all year groups, regardless of which classes are in school.

It is important for you to understand that the decision to open the school is not compulsory. The government is asking us to open – the final decision about whether we can do that safely lies in the hands of the Head Teacher and the Governing Body.

Next Steps

Once we have an idea of numbers of parents wanting their children to access school, we will then finalise risk assessments and get back in touch with you all again. It could well be that we feel that the numbers are too great and further decisions may need to be made about prioritising certain groups of children, year groups etc....

Rest assured that no decision has been made yet and all decisions made about which children can return will be made on the basis of the health and safety of both the children and staff. There are no definite answers here and all of this may have to change should the infection rate fail to sufficiently decrease over the next few weeks.

The thought of gradually opening our school to an increasing number of children is really exciting – we cannot wait to have the school back to the happy, lively, vibrant place it should be. Equally, we want to be able to give our Year 6 children the best half-term and send-off possible!

I care passionately about the children, staff and whole school community and only want the very best for everyone. Thank you for your support, understanding and patience.

Best Wishes,

Jane Davis

Mrs Jane Davis
Head Teacher