

15th May 2020

Parent / Carer Update:

Hello everyone!

I hope this letter finds you as safe and as well as you can be at this time.

This is a lengthy letter, so please make a cup of tea and find 10 minutes so you can sit and read it through 😊

Like every school in England, we are writing to parents and carers to explain as best we can where the latest government guidance leaves us.

The most important thing to stress is the Prime Minister's use of the word '**if**'

As things stand, we will not know with any absolute certainty about whether or not to begin a phased return of some pupils in June, until the government has received, and looked at, the scientific evidence for the coming two weeks, on Thursday 28th May. I know the various unions are all very concerned for their members and there are very mixed opinions.

As has often happened in the past, we will know the outcome at the same time as you!

Whilst we are waiting to hear, schools are looking at how they **might** be able to have some more children back in school, and keep everyone safe at the same time.

It is also important to remember that when the government makes suggestions for schools, they have in mind mainstream schools. You will know from your own experience of both mainstream schools and Thomas Ashton School, that under the surface, we are different in many ways. What might work well in one might not be the best idea in the other.

For example, whilst mainstream Year 6 face a big transition to high schools and are therefore a priority, most of Year 6 in Thomas Ashton School stay with us, so are less of a priority. However, Year 9 at Thomas Ashton School will be moving to another provision, whereas in mainstream Year 9 stay put. We need to find a way of supporting this transition for our Year 9 pupils.



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Headteacher: Mr R Elms

As is the case with most things, we work with our families as individuals not as groups, and the conversations class leaders have had with you by phone and email will help us in deciding next steps for pupils.

We may need to consider running a rota for some children depending on: how often we have children in school, how many at the same time and when, in order to accommodate the pupils we need to be seeing.

As is the case with everything else, we work with our families as individuals not as groups, and our conversations with you have helped us understand how you are coping at this moment. This will be a factor in deciding next steps for pupils.

We are trying to find out from the government how much we can plan for the needs of our individual pupils, and how much we must follow the guidance and direction from government. Once we know this we can move forward with our planning.

The big challenge for us will be how we ensure we follow the rules of 'social distancing' and 'good hygiene' in school.

We know from experience that children can respond differently to things at home and in school. We will need more co-operation, patience and understanding than ever before to help us all get through these next few months.

We are also realistic and understand that for many of our children, these are qualities we are helping you to build in them, and that they represent some of the fundamental reasons why our children struggle in a mainstream setting.

One pupil told me this morning that 'children are immune' from the virus and it is adults that have to be careful!

It is important to remember that we are all still vulnerable to the virus, but for some there is a lower risk, and for others a much higher risk.

We have been told that children are generally low risk, but we have also been told that children can carry, and spread the virus, so we are very dependent as adults in school, on you at home ensuring your children are following the rules.

I have the job of trying to make sure school is as safe as possible for both children and adults, but there is no guarantee there will be 'no risk' until a vaccine has been successfully trialled.

We will be working with 'Public Health England' to get advice on what a 'safer building' could look like in terms of numbers of children and adults, regular cleaning and hygiene.

We also have to know what 'too risky' might look like, which will include children's behaviours concerning aggression, spitting, trying to leave the premises or simply refusing to follow the 'new rules' once we have established them (social distancing and hand washing for example).

The government advice at the moment is that PPE is not necessary beyond what might normally be used in schools.

However, the government are now encouraging the wearing of face masks in certain social situations away from school, such as shopping, public spaces and use of public transport.

We are unsure at this moment what the rules will be for those children who are transported to school or come on the bus. There are only so many taxis available to transport children, and keeping apart in a taxi can only be achieved by having fewer children on board at any one time.

We may need to consider staggering start and finish times, and if we did have some children in school on a rota, what this would look like over the course of a week or a fortnight.

We have continued to offer daily provision for the children of key workers, and we have had other children in school for individual reasons. We assume we will be expected to continue offering these places, so any other pupils we have in school will need to be addition to these children.

When we know the safe limit for children and adults in school, we will know more about what our offer could look like.

I guess I'm trying to say the easy part is sitting in front of a camera telling the nation that children might start going back to school in June. The hard part is actually how to make this happen safely for all concerned with all the restrictions still in place!

At the moment we do not have all our staff available for work in school. We have some staff who are not able to be in school at the moment for health reasons or because they are shielding members of their family.

This will apply to you as well. I'm aware of some children we are unlikely to see until at least September due to circumstances within the family at home.

The government say they will continue to relax the rules regarding school attendance, so you and I can work together to make the right, and best, decision for your child and your family.

We have parents and staff alike who are very anxious about the current situation, and I must listen very carefully to everyone's concerns, and act appropriately, whilst understanding that the government has the aspiration to see some children return for some form of education before the end of the summer term.

I'm sorry this is a long letter, but the issues are quite complex, and there is a lot of talking and working things out to be done before we get to half term, and the start of June.

It would be really helpful to have some idea of how many parents and carers **feel uncertain about the idea of your child returning to school before the summer, and your reasons for it**. I am asking if you could share how you feel with your class teacher. They will be contacting you over the course of the next week, or you could email them with your thoughts.

For some, there will be reasons based on health and safety within the family. For others, it might be a feeling of real anxiety. Please feel confident this information will be dealt with in strict confidence, and it is to help me understand as much as possible, your situation as it stands at the moment.

If you would rather speak to me direct, please phone school and ask for me, or email me at relms@thomasashton.tameside.sch.uk

I will stop writing for now. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter through. These are unique times, and there is nothing in the 'teacher's manual' to say how we get through it!

I hope you feel your class leader and their teams have been as supportive as possible over the last few weeks, and that you feel you have had access to resources that have helped provide some learning for your children. I also hope the chrome books are safe and secure and have been useful and well used at home!

We continue to be in a situation where staying safe (as well as alert) is our top priority, both for ourselves and for others. I wish you well and look forward to hearing from you, either through the class leaders, or direct to myself!

Best wishes,



Robin Elms