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Every Child, Every Chance, Every Day

Dear Parents and Carers

Shirley Schools - COVID-19 Update

I hope you and your families are all keeping well and have been able to take advantage of the limited relaxation of the lockdown restrictions recently announced by the Government.

I would like to take this opportunity to update you all on our planning for the phased return of children to primary schools that was announced by the Prime Minister in his address to the nation on Sunday 9th May.

As you know, our schools have remained open to children of critical key workers during this lockdown period. The [Government has now asked](#) primary schools to welcome back children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. To prepare for this, it has also asked schools to prepare risk assessments to address the risks posed by the coronavirus in a school environment and to ensure that measures are put in place to minimise these risks for the children and staff.

The Government is currently issuing [guidance](#) to assist schools in preparing their risk assessments and our school leaders and staff are working very hard to interpret and apply this guidance to the specific circumstances we face within our two schools (eg, the specific layout of our classrooms, corridors, stairways and playgrounds). This is an unprecedented situation and so it is understandable that guidance is continuing to evolve at all levels (ie, national, regional and local) and our own plans must also change accordingly.

The Government has indicated that this phased return will only continue if it can be justified on the basis of its [five key tests](#). Therefore, there is no guarantee that it will start next month. You may also have seen in the media that there are ongoing discussions between the Government and the unions representing the staff within our schools on the arrangements for the phased return and the outcome of these discussions may also have an impact on the timing of the phased return, as well as our planning and the arrangements within the schools.

Despite this uncertainty, at this point in time we must plan based on the latest guidance we have received which is for a phased return of children to start next month.

I am in regular contact with our Head Teachers and they and their staff have already done a phenomenal amount of work in planning for the phased return of our children. We can all be very proud of their professionalism and their dedication to the safety and well being of all our children - this will be at the core of everything we do in our schools, now and always!

It is also important to be open with you and make you aware that there is still a significant amount of work to do before we will be in a position to share our detailed plans with you.

I know that it is frustrating not knowing what will happen next month in terms of whether and when you will be able to send your children to school and I really appreciate your patience. I can assure you that we are working through the details as quickly as we can and we will provide more information as soon as possible.

Our first task will be to complete our risk assessments, including determining the best way to configure our school environment to accommodate a phased return and the appropriate staff-to-pupil ratios required to protect our children and staff within the schools. We are also currently determining the number of staff that we will have available to work in each school from next month, taking into account factors such as shielding and self isolation. Once this work is complete, we will be able to assess how many children we can accommodate within each school and we will then be in a position to provide you with details of how to apply for a place. We are also currently assessing the likely demand for places and I would like to thank all of you who have completed the parent survey to assist us in this.

Based on our initial estimate of the number of children we can accommodate in the schools and the number of children who will request a place from within the eligible groups (ie, the children of critical key workers and children currently in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6), it is very likely that the demand for places will exceed the number of places that we can make available. Therefore, we will need to operate a strict prioritisation policy to allocate the available places. This policy is currently being agreed across schools in our Trust and we will provide details of this as soon as possible, as well as details of how you can apply for a place.

It is important to note that we will not be able to accept any child into school unless they have had their place formally confirmed by the schools. No child, regardless of their status, has an automatic entitlement to a school place during this period.

As I am sure you will all understand, our ability to plan and control the number of children that we accept into school during this period is critical in ensuring the safety and well being of our children and staff.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I appreciate that there is a lot to take in and I am sure it will leave you with lots of questions. We will do our best to answer these in our communications with you over the coming days and weeks and we will endeavour to bring clarity to this situation as quickly as we can.

Please can I ask that you refrain from contacting the school with questions or requests for further information at the present time. I can assure you that we will make more information available as soon as possible.

Let me finish by thanking you all for your support and understanding during this challenging time. This tentative easing of the lockdown restrictions should bring us all hope and encouragement that we are starting our journey back to normality!

Best wishes and keep smiling :-)

Pete Gould

Peter Gould

Chair of Governors, Shirley Infant and Shirley Junior School

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