

Learning for Life!



Headteacher: **Ms Annemari Ottridge** M.Ed. NPQH NPQEL

12th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

We are rapidly approaching the end of May and Spring is steadily dissolving into Summer. Normally, at this time of year, most families would be planning bank holiday BBQs and family events for the Summer half-term.

But this Spring is quite different and after such a long period of changes to our normal lives we are taking our first steps towards easing some of the restrictions put in place by the Government seven weeks ago. Those measures were strong and touched everyone. We have had to readjust our lives and ways of doing things to protect ourselves and keep us safe. Despite all of our efforts some have lost loved ones and our hearts go out to those families during this sad time.

We are beginning to consider ways in which step-by-step we can get adults back to work and children back to school safely. To Lonsdale School it means changing how we organise ourselves and do things in our school to make it possible for both students and staff to return to school when it is safe to do so.

After Prime Minister Johnson's speech on Sunday and his subsequent press conference yesterday evening, schools in England have been given guidance to proceed with partial opening during the Summer term. The National Guidance will be followed by Hertfordshire Local Authority Guidance, which will be available for maintained special schools early next week. Until this information is published, individual schools can only second-guess what it may entail.

Our Lonsdale team and the Board of Governors have continued to plan and model a number of options based on school risk assessments, health and safety guidelines and any research available to the school. We are confident that Lonsdale School has systems in place to implement a safe 'return to school' plan.

The Government guidance for special schools from Monday, 11th May, outlines the following:

'Special schools, special post-16 institutions and hospital schools should work towards welcoming back as many children and young people as can be safely catered for in their setting. They may want to prioritise attendance based on key transitions and the impact on life chances and development, and to consider creating part-time attendance rotas so that as many children as possible can benefit from attending their setting. Special settings should work with local authorities and families to ensure that decisions about attendance are informed by existing risk assessments for their children and young people, which should be kept up to date.'

In addition to our school's capacity to reconfigure the environment and our classrooms, we must liaise with our NHS partners, who are an integral part of our child-centred support for your child at Lonsdale School. As you know from my previous correspondence, for now NHS staff have been deployed to support acute care in the community.

The Local Authority transport arrangements will be subject to a major re-configuration since children travelling in minibuses will still need to follow social distancing. The school is waiting for a communication from County Transport, which may mean that some children and families have to consider alternative ways of travelling to and from school for a period of time while the risk of infection remains high.

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Our school staff have been working a rota, with some of us being here on a daily basis to support our key workers' children and those deemed vulnerable by Social Care and the school. The staff will return to work subject to their own childcare and schooling arrangements. Until we have some clarity on local plans, we are unable to predict what things will look like for our school's staffing capacity.

The school that children and staff knew and were familiar with when they left some eight weeks ago is not the same. It has had to adapt quickly to make sure that children and adults attending the school are safe. The classrooms can no longer accommodate the same number of students because of the 2m social distancing rule. Staff are now wearing full PPE (aprons, gloves and masks/visors) when supporting students in their personal care, feeding, moving and handling and other activities where social distancing is not possible. Wearing masks and not able to see reassuring smiles can be hard for some of our students.

But I do want to make your child's return to school a positive one. Some classes may start as mixed groups and children will have restricted access to areas beyond their classroom and outdoor areas. By creating small group 'bubbles' within school, we can reduce the risk of infection for all. The school will operate a one-way system in corridors and children will be dismissed from their 'bubble' groups at the end of the day at staggered times.

The school will feel different and not everyone can attend at the same time. It is more than likely that children will have to access blended learning where their work mixes 'home learning' and 'face2face sessions' at school. We already have teams curating online content and offering plans for you to support 'home learning' with your child.

I'm writing this letter with my heart full of hope and optimism that we can make this work for everyone in the end. I appreciate that expectations and what is safely possible can sometimes be problematic. I cannot wait to see your children back at school, hear their voices, their laughter and their presence. At the same time, it is my duty to make sure that we have done everything we can to reduce the risk to your children and to staff whilst they are at school.

You have my commitment to bring our school community together as soon as it is possible and safe to do so following the guidance from the government and local authority.

With warmest wishes

Annemari Ottridge
Headteacher

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