

Monday 18th May 2020

Dear Parents/ Carers & Infinity Families,

You will be aware that last week the Government announced a desire for children in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to begin to return to school from the 1st June. To assist schools with this they have released a vast array of guidance documents over the last 7 days. These have trickled into schools over the last week, many appearing late in the evening and often with contradictory information! To be frank, the guidance is not particularly clear or practical and therefore senior leaders from across the Trust have spent a considerable amount of time unpicking and discussing the various aspects of the guidance and how it relates to our schools and to the Infinity Academies Trust. I therefore thought it would be useful for me to write to you to outline our thinking at this stage and to begin to illustrate what school may look like for those children in a position to return.

It is important to point out that our schools have been open throughout the COVID-19 pandemic including through Easter and each of the bank holidays. I am grateful to all of our Infinity Academies Trust staff and external contractors, for their hard work and commitment to enable our emergency childcare to take place. Our schools will also be open throughout the upcoming half term. Our emergency childcare provision for Key Workers and Vulnerable children remains unchanged going forwards even as we begin to bring other groups of children back into school.

We have found it very difficult to understand how the guidance for schools varies so greatly to that given to the public. Outside of schools, we are all expected to social distance; to avoid groups; to only meet with one other person outside and not to mix between households. Yet in two weeks' time, the Government expects that we will open our doors to a significant number of children (nearly 200 in some of our larger schools). They anticipate that we will be able to manage the large number of children and their parents safely on and off our school sites; that we will have created "bubbles" of small groups of children and staff that are not allowed to mix with anyone else; that we will have rearranged our classrooms; created one way systems around our corridors and found a way to provide lunches without any "bubble" groups crossing paths! We are also expected to have cleared away all of our equipment, toys and resources, briefed our staff on new approaches to health & safety, risk assessed everything we intend to do and considered how we would manage the illness of staff and pupils if it should occur A challenging task to say the very least!

Children are the centre of all we do at Infinity Academies Trust and we are desperate to have our children back in school. However, safety and safeguarding are **always** our number one priority and I have said from the very beginning that I am not prepared to do anything that I

think might risk the welfare of our children, their families and of our staff. I feel it is pertinent to make a few things clear about what school will look like and feel like for those returning:

- Children cannot effectively social distance. We will do our utmost to try to encourage this but with all children, regardless of age, it is virtually impossible! We cannot guarantee that your child will be able to socially distance at all times.
- The physical limitations of our classrooms mean that we will not be able to operate groups of 15 as suggested by the Government. Our groups will need to be much smaller in order to provide the best chance of social distancing.
- It is highly likely your child will not be with their usual class teacher or teaching assistant. Classes will be split (into “bubbles”) and therefore each small group will require two staff (minimum) who will stay with them the whole time. Staff will not be permitted to go into other rooms or work with other children that are not in their group. Pupils will not be able to mix with anyone outside of their small group even at playtimes and lunchtimes.
- The classrooms will look very different. All surfaces will have to be cleared to facilitate continual cleaning during the day and children of all ages will have to sit at individual desks.
- Lunches will have to be eaten in the classrooms at the desk your child been allocated.
- We will not be able to operate before or after school clubs or childcare at the schools that usually do this, as it would mean different groups of children having to mix.
- The usual end of year and summer activities will not take place. These include Sports Days, Year 6 productions, leaver’s assemblies and Year 6 end of year celebrations.
- Children may see staff wearing Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if they have to deal with any illness or sickness.
- The curriculum will be very different as group or paired activities can no longer take place, equipment cannot be shared and children will not be able to move freely around the classroom or school.

This is by no means an exhaustive list but I think it is important that as parents you have the chance to speak with your child about how different school may look and feel if/ when they return. I know it will break the heart of many of our staff not to be able to give your children a hug when they return or even talk with their class as a whole group. We all need to be prepared for this.

We encourage parents to reflect on what is right for their child and family and if you make the decision not to send your child back to school please be reassured that this does not impact on your school place nor will you be questioned over your child’s attendance. It is completely your decision. The Government have made it clear that usual attendance protocols will not be in effect over the summer term.

Further to this, please be cautious about comparing our approach to the return to school with that of other schools locally. Each school is unique with regard to the size of its rooms, the layout of the buildings, the availability of its staff and the challenges they face. I am sure some

schools will feel confident in carrying out the Government guidance to its fullest whilst others will have to take a different approach that better suits their context.

Over the course of the next few days we will be finalising our plans and you will receive a letter from your school on Thursday. The letter will provide the precise detail of how the school will operate, the measures being put into place, which children will be returning and when, and what you will need to do when you bring your child to school.

I feel it is important to be open and transparent. It is highly unlikely that all children from Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 will be asked back into school on the 1st June. We know this decision is about protecting lives and therefore we cannot get this wrong - a prudent approach would be to gradually build-up the number of parents and staff on our sites over time. Please be patient with us as we implement this, we are desperately trying to avoid rushing into making decisions which we later regret.

Our provision for key workers remains unchanged. As soon as other children begin to return, our Key Worker children will become their own group ("bubble") and stay with the same staff members to avoid mixing. The Government defined list of key workers remains the same so we do not anticipate this group growing in number during the coming weeks.

I would like to thank you and all of our school communities for their support throughout this challenging time and I hope you can understand that our ambition is to bring our children back to school in a safe and well-planned manner. As always, we will keep all of our decisions under regular review and make sure you are informed every step of the way.

Please keep checking our websites for updates and the school specific letters which will be sent out on Thursday.

I look forward to seeing you all as soon as it is safely possible.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Booth', written in a cursive style.

Gavin Booth
Chief Executive Officer