



Mill Water School

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Dear Parents and Carers

As we begin to open up to more pupils in the coming weeks, I thought it might be helpful to some of you if we shared our rationale for some of the difficult decisions we have had to make over the last few weeks. We have had to think carefully about:

- how many pupils and staff can be safely accommodated in school whilst maintaining social distancing and good hand and respiratory hygiene;
- where it is clear that pupils will be safer at home;
- and when taking pupils out for walks in the community would be the best solution for families and staff;

and I want to reassure you that regardless of whether your son or daughter will be coming into school or not, all pupils will continue to receive a home learning package with telephone, email or zoom support from teachers.

One question you might be asking is why we have had to keep the number of pupils returning to school low.

Our starting point in making our decisions has been advice given by the Department for Education, the Local Authority, and Public Health England (PHE).

Throughout the guidelines issued to all schools in the following document:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

the government has urged *a cautious approach, recognising that the safety and wellbeing of children, the staff that work with them, and the public is paramount.*

In para 1.4, the document asks *Can you guarantee it will be safe for pupils and staff?* The answer given is: *Children, young people and teachers' safety is our top priority. That's why we are taking a cautious, phased approach to the wider opening of schools.*

Operating safely is clearly our number one priority.

A second question would then be to ask what measures are we putting in place to keep everyone safe. The document referred to above goes on to say:

We have worked closely with Public Health England (PHE) to develop guidance on implementing protective measures which schools should put in place. This guidance sets out a hierarchy of controls which schools should work through and which, when implemented, create an inherently safer system where the risk of transmission of infection is significantly reduced.

These controls are:

- *avoiding contact with anyone with symptoms*
- *frequent hand cleaning and good hygiene practices*
- *regular cleaning of settings*
- *minimising contact and mixing*

Para 1.5 says that *Schools should work through the hierarchy of controls to reduce the risk of transmission – crucially minimising contact and mixing by keeping children and staff in small consistent groups and keeping groups away from each other.*

The government has issued further advice on what steps schools should take to minimise the risk of infection when they open more widely in:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

As a school we have had to work through every aspect of this guidance because we know that our children cannot socially distance or maintain hand or respiratory hygiene. On top of this, SEND school buildings have much smaller class spaces than their mainstream counterparts as well as higher numbers of staff to pupil ratios. We are implementing significant control measures to mitigate the raised level of risk that exists for our pupils and staff. These measures have been shared with the Local Authority by means of a comprehensive risk assessment covering all aspects of school life.

Hygiene

The above document asks: *What about the risk to staff working hands-on with pupils and students who cannot adhere to strict hygiene practices?* And answers with:

We recognise that some children and young people with special educational needs present behaviours that are challenging to manage in the current context, such as spitting uncontrollably. It will be impossible to provide the care that some children and young people need without close hands-on contact. In these circumstances, staff should minimise close contact wherever possible, increase hand-washing and other hygiene measures, and clean surfaces more regularly and maintain existing routine use of personal protective equipment. We recommend that educational settings follow the Public Health England guidance on cleaning in non-healthcare settings and the guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children's social care settings.

During the course of this week, all staff have been trained in our new ways of working with regards to managing behaviours, hygiene and cleaning. We will be following the Covid-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance and will:

- ensure that sufficient handwashing facilities and hand sanitiser are available
- clean surfaces that children and young people are touching, such as toys, books, desks, chairs, doors, sinks, toilets, light switches, handrails, sensory equipment and stationery more regularly than normal
- ensure that all adults and children:
 - frequently wash their hands with soap and water for 20 seconds and dry thoroughly
 - clean their hands on arrival at the setting, before and after eating, and after sneezing or coughing
 - are encouraged not to touch their mouth, eyes and nose
 - use a tissue or elbow to cough or sneeze and use bins for tissue waste ('catch it, bin it, kill it')

- ensure that help is available for children and young people who have trouble cleaning their hands independently
- encourage children to learn and practise these habits through games, songs and repetition
- ensure that bins for tissues are emptied throughout the day
- where possible, all spaces will be well ventilated whilst maintaining the safety of children who cannot remain in an area without help.

We have noted that the guidance says that there is no need for anything other than normal personal hygiene and washing of clothes following a day in an educational or childcare setting

Social Distancing

The advice considers the need for social distancing both in terms of who should attend and how it should be implemented in school. **Social distancing is an issue for us and parents send their children to school in the knowledge that we cannot guarantee social distancing.**

The advice considers children who should not attend the setting because they are clinically vulnerable and many of you have rightly said that you want to keep your children at home until September because of their or your own vulnerability.

There is specific advice for children who live with somebody who is clinically vulnerable:

If a child, young person or staff member lives in a household with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable, as set out in the COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable guidance, it is advised they only attend an education or childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and, in the case of children, they are able to understand and follow those instructions. This may not be possible for very young children and older children without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social distancing. If stringent social distancing cannot be adhered to, we do not expect those individuals to attend. They should be supported to learn or work at home.

The advice considers class sizes and recommends the implementation of “bubbles” which are small groups of children who stay together throughout the school day, in one room, using the same toilet facilities.

Where settings can keep children and young people in those small groups 2 metres away from each other, they should do so. While in general groups should be kept apart, brief, transitory contact, such as passing in a corridor, is low risk.

We have considered each of our classrooms and the profile of children who can be accommodated safely whilst maintaining social distancing. This has enabled us to determine how many children the school can accommodate overall. The number is low, with a maximum of two or three children in each group. That is why we are offering so many outreach packages to families, whereby staff will come to your house to collect your child and take them out for walks in the community. The risk is immediately lowered because this is an outdoor activity, your child does not need to travel with anyone else, and the number of contacts is greatly reduced.

Where children are coming in to school there will be:

- staggered arrival and collection times
- children will stay in one room, with their own set of resources

- break times will be staggered and each group will use a specified playground to avoid having to clean playground equipment between each set of pupils
- children will eat in their classrooms. There will be no shared utensils.
- all non-washable items will be removed from classrooms. This means soft toys and toys that are hard to clean (such as those with intricate parts).

We will be restricting visitors to the school to essential contractors.

We will reduce mixing within the school by:

- accessing rooms directly from outside where possible
- implementing one-way circulation in the reception area and along the main corridor
- using social stories and symbols to support children in understanding how to follow rules
- using the outside space as much as possible.
- Reducing the number of independent activities carried out by pupils such as deliveries, giving messages, photocopying, register collection and work experience

Transport

We have been working very closely with School Transport to make sure that systems for transporting children are as safe as they can be. We will follow their comprehensive protocols when transporting children in our own school vehicles.

We are asking all parents who are transporting their own children to wait in their vehicles at the beginning and end of the school day. Staff will collect and deliver children so there is no need for any parent to enter the school building.

Our own staff have been given set time slots for their children's schools, so staggered start times enables us to match our staff to pupil ratios safely across the week.

Illness

There is an obvious expectation that no child will come to school if they are unwell.

If anyone becomes ill during the day with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia), parents will be called to collect them and advised to follow the COVID-19: guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection guidance. Guidance states that if a parent is unable to collect their child from school this should prevent them from attending.

If a child is awaiting collection, they will be moved to the nurse's room where they can be isolated behind a closed door with appropriate adult supervision if required.

PPE will be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained.

The room will be cleaned with normal household disinfectant after someone with symptoms has left following COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance.

If a pupil is sent home, they should follow the guidance which states that they should self-isolate for 7 days and arrange to have a test to see if they have COVID-19. They can do this by visiting NHS.UK to arrange or contact NHS 119 via telephone if they do not have internet access. Their fellow

household members should self-isolate for 14 days. All staff and pupils will have access to a test if they display symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), and are encouraged to get tested in this scenario.

Where the child, young person or staff member tests negative, they can return to school and the fellow household members can end their self-isolation.

Where the child, young person or staff member tests positive, the rest of their school group will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members of that group do not need to self-isolate unless the child, young person or staff member they live with in that group subsequently develops symptoms.

I hope you will appreciate the work that all members of staff have undertaken in order to make sure that the school is as safe as it can be, but we have to acknowledge that the risk cannot be eliminated, only managed as far as we are able. I can be contacted about any of the information contained should you wish.

Moving forward, we do not know what school attendance will look like in July or September but I will endeavour to communicate with you at every stage of our planning. May I take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support and understanding at this time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Sarah Pickering
Headteacher

The Guidance Documents referred to in my letter can be found online at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-send-risk-assessment-guidance>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>