



Outer West Learning Trust

22nd May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

First of all, we hope you are all well under the current situation and our best wishes go out to everyone connected to our OWL Trust schools. We appreciate your continued support in the way we are responding to the national crisis. We are missing the vibrant daily atmosphere that is always apparent across the schools in the outer west of Newcastle. It goes without saying that we all wish to return to normal school life.

We wrote to you last week after much advice from government, the scientific community, the Local Authority and our OWL Trust of schools on the intention to re-open schools on 1st of June 2020. We indicated at that time, the great uncertainty around this intention. This picture continues nationally as schools attempt to ensure they are supporting the government in this pledge but at the same time, making measured decisions about the safety of pupils and staff.

At that time, it was the decision of the OWL Trust headteachers that a return for our youngest pupils in nursery, reception and year 1 was clearly the least preferred option on safety grounds. However, we decided to undertake risk assessment considerations on the possibility of returning some year 6 pupils in the first instance. We believe we can take steps to ensure a safe return for these groups. However, this will be dependent upon the successful conclusion of our risk assessment and consultation with staff, parents and governors as well as on the national picture of COVID transmission. Remember, any return to school still remains conditional with regard to meeting the government's tests for unlocking the restrictions that have been in place. These risk assessments cover every aspect of school life for a returning pupil and members of staff - some of the most apparent concerns are as follows:

- The increase in the numbers of pupils expected within the school buildings and ensuring 2m social distancing for both pupils and staff within classrooms, corridors, toilets, yards etc.
- The capacity of the school facilities staff to deep clean rooms on a timely basis.
- The ability of cleaning regimes to prevent the spread of the virus from shared equipment and surfaces, including the problem of shared work materials, books, apparatus or soft furnishings.
- The complexities of serving meals and food hygiene.
- Dealing with intimate care issues, medical or first aid procedures.
- Dealing with children who require support for emotional difficulties or behaviours through physical intervention.
- The separation of groups already undertaking childcare and present in the school currently - operating in 'bubbles' so as not to mix pupils and staff.
- The capacity to operate 'bubbles' appropriately with the levels of staff available.
- Giving the children a sterile school experience that they are unaccustomed to.

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We will therefore be writing to year 6 parents when we return after half term to outline what the education offer will look like and asking if they will take up a place. Parents and carers are best placed to make this decision and no family will be penalised for non-attendance in these instances. Once we have the numbers of pupils, we can work to further explore safety measures, the deployment of staff and the timing of a return for year 6.

We are aware that across our Trust there is currently not a great confidence among most parents to return to school. In our OWL Trust parent survey last week, only 19% indicated they would return but we understand this may change. Similarly, it is important that our staff are confident in their working practices and we will be looking to their experience to further inform our safety planning. We plan to discuss safety protocols with all our staff during the week of the 1st June 2020 and utilise this first week back after half term in order to prepare the environment for future returning pupils.

After returning from the half term break, we will continue to offer childcare for key workers and vulnerable pupils if required/ essential. They will operate in isolation of any future returning group. Numbers in this provision will have to also be continually risk assessed and managed by school staff safely before the subsequent year 6 group. We know also that the return of year 6 is likely to greatly increase the numbers in our schools. Once we have had time to evaluate the success of our first wave of returning pupils, we will then consider the next groups that the government intend to return. Suffice to say, we do not envisage a return for all pupils by the end of the summer term. These decisions will be based upon our daily monitoring, the advice we receive and in consultation with all stakeholders (including the OWL Trust Board) - so that we are sure the safety of pupils and staff is not compromised.

Please continue to look to the website, Twitter and for emails from school for further information on this fluid situation. Please do not send your child to school until we have communicated directly with you regarding their individual return date and instructions.

We thank you for your continued support at this difficult time.

Yours faithfully,

Julie Stuart
Headteacher
**Throckley Primary
School**

Suzanne Richardson
Headteacher
**Milecastle Primary
School**

Louise Thompson
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