



St Patrick's RCVA Primary School
Stanley Street, Consett, Co. Durham, DH8 6LN

Tel: 01207 503982

Fax: 01207 588918

Email: consettstpatrick@durhamlearning.net

Website: www.stpatricksrc-consett.durham.sch.uk

Head Teacher: Mrs Jennifer M Gill

15th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

I am sure that you will be aware of the latest Government announcement regarding the gradual reopening of schools from 1st June, along with the vast amount of speculation and commentary that has been circulating in the press following this announcement.

I know that many parents have expressed serious concerns regarding the potential return to school and hope that this letter addresses some of these immediate concerns and questions.

Firstly, I think it is important to note that the first stage of reopening is intended to be a **'phased return of some children from 1st June, at the earliest'**. The year groups indicated in Government guidance are Reception, Year 1 and Year 6.

I would also like to stress that staff want nothing more than to be able to return to school and get back to normality; the staff of St Patrick's are dedicated and hard working and it has been incredibly difficult to be away from the routine, structure, joy and immense satisfaction that we get from the day to day contact with our amazing young people, but we must ensure that this return does not jeopardise the safety of children, families and staff.

The reopening of school is an operational decision that will consider the Department for Education guidance, Local Authority advice and the context of our school. There is not one size fits all approach to reopening and each school is likely to approach this in a different way. This decision will be made by the leadership team, along with the Governing Body of the school.

A full risk assessment will be carried out before any final decision is made. The risk assessment will determine whether or not it is safe for pupils and staff to return to school, and which pupils will begin first (we envisage that for our school, Y6 will be the first group of pupils to return). **Please note that school will not be reopening at 9am on the 1st June for all Year 6, Reception and Nursery.**

Any return to school will undoubtedly be very different to what we recognise as 'normal school' and there are many factors that will need to be considered when carrying out the risk assessment and planning:

- 'lessons' will not cover new learning so as not to disadvantage any pupils not in school
- timetables will need to be adapted, with potentially staggered start and finish times
- class sizes will be reduced; children will be placed into 'bubble' groups who will stay together all day, every day, to prevent mixing to enable effective tracking and tracing
- there will be supervised handwashing and comfort breaks allocated throughout the day
- children will not be permitted to bring any items from home (except a water bottle and packed lunch which must be in a small packed lunch bag)
- they will be given a small plastic bag containing their learning resources which will remain in school
- if a child or adult within a bubble shows symptoms and/or tests positive for COVID-19, the whole bubble will need to self-isolate for 14 days
- children are unlikely to be in their familiar classroom or with their familiar adult/s
- we will not be able to offer extended provision (breakfast or after school clubs)

- it is unlikely that children will attend full days, or every day to begin with
- we will also have to review behaviour policies to reflect new rules and routines necessary to reduce risk – children who are unable to adhere to these new rules will not be allowed to remain in school
- strict social distancing will be maintained throughout the school; this will include the yard and entrance
- parents will not be allowed onto the school site and social distancing will still apply outside the school gates (communication with school must be via phone or email)
- children will have the opportunity for outdoor play but this will be in within social distancing guidelines and no equipment will be used
- there will be no assemblies, gatherings, visits or group activities of any kind (i.e. end of year celebrations, sports' day)
- the uniform policy will need to be amended (further details to follow)
- each bubble will eat together in their allocated room – children will be need to bring a packed lunch, or a packed lunch can be provided which will be charged at the normal rate (children eligible for a free school meal will be provided with a packed lunch)

Additionally, we will need to ensure that there is a plan in place should we be unable to maintain adequate staffing levels due to illness or self-isolation.

Your input into this planning is extremely important. I completely understand that many parents will not want to send their child back to school at the moment and will be concerned about the implications; be reassured that, should you decide not to send your child back at the moment, you **will not be fined** for non-attendance. In order to help us gauge parental feeling, I ask that you complete a simple survey online: *If your child is invited back to school in the summer term, would you send them?* This information will be help us plan the next steps. The link will be sent via text message. If you have more than one child, please complete a separate survey for each child.

We will, of course, continue to provide emergency care for children of **critical workers** and provide ongoing support for children still at home using our online platforms, class blogs and learning packs; this will be the same as what is being done in school.

I recognise also that many parents are concerned about their own financial and job security and the pressure to return to work from employers. The message from the Government still continues to be 'work from home' if you are able to do so and I would urge you to speak to your employer should you have concerns around this area. Businesses have been provided with significant financial support to ensure that employees are not disadvantaged or discriminated against during this pandemic. This means that we cannot accommodate requests for childcare of children not invited back to school. I also fully appreciate that even a phased return will still create difficulties with childcare but school is unable to support you with this. We are also unable to provide you with details of when your child will be in at this point or the numbers we envisage being able to accommodate each day. I know that this is extremely difficult for families. School staff are in a similar position and we fully understand how stressful this is.

This is only the beginning of our gradual return to normality, there is a long way to go, many questions remain unanswered and we may face further lockdowns and/or partial closures. Further information will be provided in due course. Please work with us as we move forward and always remember that safeguarding the health, safety and wellbeing of children, families and staff rests at the heart of all decisions that we take.

With very best wishes



Mrs Jennifer M Gill
Head Teacher