

20 May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer

Introduction:

I hope you, and your families, are healthy and coping well in this challenging time. As you will be aware, recent government announcements have been made regarding the wider re-opening of schools from Monday 1 June 2020.

Before I explain what they are, and what they mean to us, I wanted to first of all take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing support of the schools in the Trinity Trust. We have continued to educate approximately 100 young people on a daily basis since our partial closure, namely the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils. Whilst doing so, we have also tried to produce relevant and engaging activities for all those pupils who have remained at home, to the very best of our ability. Once again, thank you for many of the positive comments that we have received during this lockdown period; every message makes a difference.

The new expectation is that, from Monday 1 June, our schools will open for:

- the children who attend our nurseries (Akroydon Primary Academy and Fountain Springs Day Nursery);
- the pupils who attend Reception, Year 1 or Year 6 at both our primary schools (Akroydon Primary Academy and St. Chad's CE Primary Academy);
- the students who attend Y10 at one of our three secondary schools (Trinity Academy Halifax, Trinity Academy Sowerby Bridge and Cathedral Academy);
- the learners who attend Y12 at Trinity Sixth Form Academy.

The guidance issued to date is complex and differs in parts across age groups, so whilst this letter to parents is from a Trust perspective, future communications will be more detailed, bespoke and directly from the school your child attends. We will also attempt, whilst trying not to overload you with information, to interpret, clearly explain and pass on the latest government guidance as it is released.

The context, and differing perspectives:

I drafted this letter a few days ago, and I have since edited it extensively as the picture is changing on a daily basis. If I waited another 48 hours, the letter would probably look different again – but, getting to the point, parents/carers need to know what our current position is so they can plan (and feedback on it), whilst understanding that it is reviewed on a daily basis and any changes are made with the health and safety of our stakeholders (the young people who attend our schools and our staff, as well as the families of those two groups) in mind.

To start, we have government advice. That advice was issued last week and is still, at the time of writing, in place. Whilst the expectation above (in the introduction) is clear, the guidance itself is not quite as clear, perhaps to allow a more flexible localised approach in practice. For example, the expectation is that all schools 'work towards it', it should be in place by 1st June 'at the earliest' and Y10 pupils should have some form of face-to-face contact. The nuances are numerous, as are the logistical challenges of delivering a coordinated approach that pleases all.

Union advice, both teaching and support staff, is divided. Mostly it is against a wider re-opening on 1st June, but it is not united in that. A similar thing can be said of local authority advice, insofar as some are supportive and some are not. Our current local authorities are Calderdale (for most of our schools) and Wakefield (for Cathedral Academy). Calderdale is advising schools not to open, and has asked that its position is communicated to staff, parents and governors, which I am happy to do. Wakefield council is adopting a similar, if less direct approach, and further information of each LA's position can be found on its respective website:

<https://www.calderdale.gov.uk/v2> and <https://www.wakefield.gov.uk/>

The Trinity position

As mentioned above, this communication is from a Trinity Trust perspective. It is designed to offer parents/carers a sense of reassurance, wherever possible, in what is a potentially significant development to our current circumstances.

- **The first, and most important thing to say, is that all decisions that we make – in every institution – will have the health and safety of all our staff and pupils (as well as that of their families) at the heart of them.**

This is our prime directive, the non-negotiable if you like, and it drives every discussion that takes place in a Trinity school. We have planned any wider re-opening around three core principles – robust risk assessment, inclusive consultation and effective communication.

In line with the second of these principles, I would stress that parents/carers do have a chance to give a view of the situation at present. It is more difficult to grasp the mood in the current partial lockdown, but I would encourage any parents/carers who do want to share their thoughts to do so by contacting our schools by replying to this message. They will reach me and be considered, although I cannot guarantee a personal reply at this point.

At a later date, individual Principals will also be contacting relevant parents i.e. those whose children are eligible to return to school, asking specifically about your intentions. We have held off on this, primarily because the picture changes daily, but I would strongly advise all parents/carers who are asked, do let us know (if at all possible) what their intentions are i.e. return their child to school, or not, or do not know. Getting as many returns as possible, whatever the response are, will help us enormously in our planning.

- **The second is that, at present, we are planning to open as requested, on Monday 1st June, for the year groups identified, across all our schools.**

This is obviously open to review, on a daily basis, and if there is a change in that approach we will communicate it directly to the parents/carers involved. It may also look slightly different from one school to another, depending on its individual situation, but again all that will be communicated to the relevant parents/carers in the future communications I mentioned above.

Outside of these two main points, there are a couple of other things worth mentioning. The first is clarity on the guidance that has been issued regarding the wider reopening of primary schools. In the guidance it states the following:

'We know that, unlike older children and adults, early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain two metres apart from each other and staff. In deciding to bring more children back to early years and school, we are taking this into account.'

For clarity, as a Trust we will follow all guidance and ensure best practice, but I want to be clear to all parents that strictly enforcing social distancing in our primary setting will not be possible. We will, however, ensure protective measures are in place e.g. avoiding contact with anyone with symptoms, frequent hand cleaning and good respiratory hygiene practices, regular cleaning of settings, minimising contact and mixing, reducing class sizes (no more than 15) etc.

All this, as a minimum, will be done, but I think it is important to be clear that certain things – in line with the guidance – cannot be guaranteed. The other relevant point on this is parental choice. Under normal circumstances, a decision to not attend an open school would bring a negative consequence; for clarity, in these times it would not. The decision about whether your child attends school or not is entirely your decision to make. We will support it and make it work, to the best of our ability, whether it is creating a school environment that is safe and engaging, or by continuing to ensure that appropriate distance learning materials are available.

The final thing is to reinforce the current, national message on social distancing. The latest guidance is that nobody should be out in groups with more than one person from a different household (only meeting outdoors and adhering to social distancing). **Young people should not be socialising with other young people outside of their own household in groups, going to houses other than their own, and we must strongly advise you to enforce this.** If we reasonably believe that young people are not following social distancing and/or self-isolation guidance (where applicable), we reserve the right to refuse entrance to school premises on this basis. We understand that this can be difficult, but it is crucial that the advice is followed to ensure we protect all young people, our staff and all our wider families.

If you are still reading(!), please accept my apologies for the length of this letter. I thought it better to produce a 'catch-all' document, as far as possible, and then for communication to become more bespoke as we move forward. Future communications, which will outline the practical planning in each school, will be from the school leaders themselves.

The first one of these will be by the end of this week, asking for the information referred to above i.e. do you intend to send your child in (or not, or undecided) on Monday 1st June. Once we have collected and analysed the feedback from that, a second letter will be produced (in the early part of next week), explaining the specific details of what the provision will look like (and the expectations for all) at your child's school. I understand that parents/carers will want this information as soon as possible, but I know they will also expect us to do this right, and that takes time.

In the meantime I hope that I have offered an informed position, which most people would consider to be reasonable in the current situation. It will not please all, I appreciate that and I am respectful of the different views on this. I hope, moving forward as a like-minded group determined to do the best for our children, the staff and our wider communities, we can work our way through this difficult period and succeed together.

Michael Gosling
CEO – Trinity MAT