

Dear Parents/carers,

I hope you are all keeping well, staying safe and making the best of the current situation. I apologise for writing to you at length, but I feel you need to know a few facts and what school will be like for your child should you decide to send them back at the time we open for more children – it is YOUR choice and there will be NO penalties for non-attendance. Our school will not be school as we have known it, with massive changes to the school day from the moment of arrival to the moment of leaving.

You will be aware of the government's guidelines to begin to phase in the opening of schools from – at the earliest – 1st June. Given the level of planning and changes to the school environment that need to be put in place, to reduce the risk of infection to staff, children and you at home, we have been given a very short amount of time to plan and implement a new school organisation. The phased return applies to Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 only (we already have vulnerable children and those of keyworkers in school). If all children within these categories return, we would potentially have over 100 children in school. It is up to schools to decide what is safe and manageable and I can tell you we will be able to reduce risk but not eliminate it.

No plans were communicated to us before the government's announcement on Sunday and they have been released slowly throughout this week. Below are a list of our plans with further detail on each aspect throughout:

1. Splitting children up into small teaching groups (referred to as a 'bubble' – same adults and same children at all times).
2. Staggered starts to the day and staggered finish times to avoid congestion at the school gates and one adult only dropping off and collecting.
3. Strict hygiene protocol will be in place and adhered to by all staff to the best of our abilities.

1.What will a BUBBLE look like?

Children will be sorted into what the government is calling 'bubbles' – meaning they will be with up to 15 other children and a team of adults comprising of their usual class teacher, teaching assistants and a constant dinner supervisor. The class teacher can only be in one 'bubble' and the 'bubbles' cannot mix at all. In this definition, we can guarantee a type of social distancing. We would decide on the 'bubbles' with children being allocated into groups through surname using alphabetical order. Siblings (of designated year groups) will be timetabled accordingly. This structure is necessary so that any outbreak of the virus can be tracked and traced and those people who have been in the affected 'bubble' can isolate and be tested. We will have a protocol and safe room for any children showing symptoms where they will be cared for until parents are contacted and signposted to testing. The bubbles are small because with proper social distancing classes can only accommodate a maximum of 15 pupils. We expect these to be smaller in all classes due to some children not attending.

2. Timings

When pupils are entering and leaving school, times will be staggered and entrances will be separate to reduce contact. Only one parent will be allowed to be with each child to drop off and pick up. These times will be provided in due course.

3.Some hygiene protocol

Excess furniture will have to be removed from classes, and each bubble will have designated toilets, classroom and outside spaces away from other bubbles and at different times. Lunches will be eaten

in 'bubbles' outside to reduce risk or in the classrooms when wet. The children will have a school (provided for FSM and Infant children) or home-packed lunch as serving hot lunches is not safe and practical. We will have PPE for First Aid and for if we have a child with symptoms. Children will have to remain at their desks or be adult-directed and keep to their designated equipment.

We are being asked to clean surfaces continuously throughout the day, wear PPE for First Aid and set out classrooms for social distancing, avoiding contact with children and between children. From our experience of already caring for children of key workers, there will be the aspiration of social distancing in a school and we will try our very best BUT we certainly cannot guarantee it.

Further details

The youngest children will be the ones who will find this most difficult. They won't have access to all the practical resources they would normally have because they all have to be kept clean to avoid infection. Young children learn by touching, doing, being with others and sharing – all of which will have to be limited as far as is possible. Therefore the adult ratio will be higher in younger classes. We will endeavour to make the experience as positive as possible for ALL our children and recognise that they will be anxious – small groups will help with this.

Winchelsea have devised a plan to enable each of the designated year groups to attend every day and children have been allocated key staff they will work with and specific areas of school that they will work within to limit contact with others.

Other schools may follow completely different systems but we have to work with our building, our facilities and our staff and this is the safest and most supportive way for the children to be at school and minimise risk for all. It must be remembered that some school staff also have children of school age they must look after.

Do we want the children and staff all back in school? Of course, we do. Are you at the end of your tether at home? Quite possibly. However, I am not going to write and tell you we can achieve social distancing and guarantee total safety in our school. We can always make things safer, we can perhaps reduce the risk but as soon as lots of children return, the risk will be there.

In this letter I have been as open as I possibly can be, but as a parent myself, I would want to know exactly what it will look like. There are many uncertainties with COVID and a lack of clarity from the Government and scientists due to the newness of the virus leaves us with many unknowns. Should you decide that you wish for your child to stay at home, that is absolutely understandable and I assure you I will respect that. Further work will continue to be set for those children. To all those children who will sadly not be involved in this initial phased opening, teachers are currently working hard to prepare more home learning resources which will be available online and hardcopy packs are to be picked up from school on the 1st June.

Further specific details and plans will be published and communicated in due course, as it must be remembered this is still a plan and will be dictated by the Government's monitoring of the R rate. Already our guidance has changed and I am sure it will again. As previously stated, the school will be a very different place – certainly this side of the summer holidays. If I am completely honest the Prime Minister's aspiration for all children to be in school for a month is sadly not one I can currently foresee in the present climate.

Finally and importantly, thank you for the time you have given to reading this – I appreciate there is a great deal of information and that this is a difficult decision to decide what to do with your most precious of gifts – your children.

Take care and stay safe,