

May 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians

I hope this letter finds you and your families well, and we hope the boys are continuing to learn, whilst not being overwhelmed by a new way of learning. We are missing seeing the boys in school, but have been hugely impressed by the way they continue to strive and learn.

I am writing to all of you with an outline of our plan for the wider re-opening of schools, with further details to come for all, and very explicit guidance for Y6 parents. Whilst there is still planning to do to get the school ready, I wanted to communicate the headline decisions to you. We are concentrating on safety and welfare, and ensuring that **social distancing** and **hygiene** are not only at the front of all of our minds but at the heart of all our plans when coming back to school.

Context

The Government has asked schools to prepare for wider re-opening from 1st June. As you know, we have been open to key workers all the way through lockdown, so we are already alive to the planning needed, but the next bit is fairly complex. The Government has, specifically, asked us to plan to welcome back Y6 from the 1st June, followed by a possible phased return of Y3-5 later in June. The Government has given clear guidance about how this should happen, as well as, crucially, very strict guidelines on social distancing and number of pupils in a class. That means, I am really sorry to say, that we are currently not planning for Y7 and Y8 to come back to school this term, unless Government guidance changes. I know this is likely to come as a huge disappointment, although for Y8 in particular, we are discussing with Mrs Loader, the Head of Year, and the Y8 team how to make their last half-term as special as possible.

Prep School education

The Government guidance has been written with Primary Schools in mind, and the Prep School operates in a very different way to Primary Schools. Firstly, Primary Schools have rarely been able to deliver the remote learning that the Prep School has offered. Secondly, in Primary Schools, the majority of teaching is undertaken by a single teacher, who teaches most subjects. We are proud of the fact that we offer subject specialist teaching from Y5 with the aim of preparing boys for a level of independence we know they need for the next stage of their education in the Upper School.

Guidance

The guidance explicitly states that Y6 classes should be no more than 15, and that the staffing model will be one teacher per group. As we have 27 teachers who teach our four Year 6 classes, that has led us to a well thought-out, creative solution, which allows the boys to continue to be taught by experts in their subjects, whilst enjoying the significant benefits of being back in school.

Organisation

Therefore, we have asked five staff to supervise Y6 classes in five groups, in order for us to adhere to the maximum class sizes. The majority of teachers, for now, will continue to teach remotely, whilst the boys will be together in class supervised by a teacher. Teachers will also, therefore, be able to continue remote teaching for all their other classes. The boys in school will also have Games and some other lessons taught in school. Therefore, what we are offering is an enhanced remote learning programme. We will ask boys to bring in a laptop, or another mobile learning device, and headphones to school so that we will be able to continue to offer specialist teaching, whilst the boys will benefit from being able to work together in groups when directed to do so by their teacher. As an advantage compared to remote learning at home, they will also enjoy the chance to interact with each other during break-times, lunchtime and during Games (although observing social distancing at all times). There may, for various reasons, be boys who are not able to return to school. In which case, they are still able to access the lessons remotely from home. Key workers' sons from other year groups will continue to be educated in school in the same way that they have for the last five weeks.

Process

We have prepared a detailed Risk Assessment and planning document, which has been scrutinised by our Health & Safety Committee, and needs to be ratified by our Governing body, and the Harpur Trust. This will be followed by training for relevant staff (as well as parents and children) and all staff in due course.

As I said, there will be more detailed guidance for Y6 parents and Y6 boys closer to June 1st, but the following provides a summary of the main measures:

- Pick up (and drop-off) will be carefully monitored so that social distancing is maintained and hand sanitisers are used. Boys will be immediately directed to groups specific toilets to wash hands with soap and water before going to their new classrooms
- Boys will be in groups of no more than 15. They will work, play and move around the estate only in these groups, and spend time with one teacher only
- Play areas will be clearly marked for each group
- Classrooms will be set out with fewer desks to comply with social distancing guidelines; each boy will be allocated his own desk
- Signs will remind boys and staff of the importance of handwashing, social distancing and coughing into elbow or using tissues
- A nurse will be located in the Prep School at all times that boys are on site
- Classrooms, corridors and door handles will be regularly cleaned
- Boys will eat in the dining halls in two sittings, in different areas for each group, and social distancing will be in place at all times; boys and staff will collect their food, cutlery and water from collection points
- Boys will wear summer uniform (or at least shirt and (optional) jumper with no blazer as we realise that not everyone will have bought summer uniform) and sports kit on days when they have sport; clean uniform will be worn each day
- Hygiene stations will be set up in each room including PPE, hand-sanitiser, wipes etc
- The boys will be told not to share any items

Whilst we will adhere to stringent measures, we realise that the boys will be hugely looking forward to seeing each other after such a long time apart, and this will be recognised, and opportunities will be built in for discussion and fun together in the circumstances.

There is more detail to come, and careful planning required to achieve it, but I hope that this makes clear the way forward for now. It is worth reiterating what the Head Master wrote in his letter in the bulletin, that currently, there seem only two reasons why we won't be open for Y6 boys – either the Government may decide that it is not safe enough to go ahead with opening (they will decide definitively nearer the time) or we may decide through a strict process of risk assessment that we are not ready ourselves. As you would expect, we are doing all we can to obviate the latter.

Many thanks, as ever, for your tremendous support during this most testing time, and for your ongoing feedback, particularly to the most recent survey which we will respond to shortly.

All the very best

Ian Silk
Headmaster
Bedford Preparatory School