



HIGH HESKET C of E SCHOOL (VC)

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Dear Parents,

INFORMATION RELATING TO THE PROPOSED REOPENING OF PRIMARY SCHOOLS

I am following on from my communications regarding the government announcement that schools should begin to prepare for a proposed reopening for children in Early Years, Year 1 and Year 6. Whilst the idea of children beginning to return to school will be a welcome one for many, it will also have naturally raised significant concerns and questions about the safety of pupils and how to ensure everything is put in place to limit the spread of the coronavirus as much as is feasibly possible. Although there has been guidance issued to schools over the last few days, there is still very much that appears unclear and, as you may have seen in the media, there are still many conflicting views as to the safety of the government's proposals. We have missed our pupils greatly and fully appreciate that any length away from formal education is not ideal; we want all our children to return to the classrooms as soon as it is safe and possible for them to do so. However, the current situation relating to the continuing spread of COVID-19 does pose many complex challenges if schools are to open and it is absolutely essential that measures are put in place that keep our children and our staff as safe as possible. We are still yet to hear confirmation as to whether the plans will go ahead, as much will depend on government risk assessments nearer the time, but I wanted to share more detail about our plans with you all so you can be prepared for any future return to school in the current climate.

This is a lengthy letter but I do not apologise for the amount of detail I am about to share. This must be a team effort across our whole school community. I am under no illusion that our plans will not suit everyone but we are doing our best to meet needs whilst reacting to our school's individual circumstances, and also considering the government guidance. When school reopens, it will **NOT** be a return to normal working. Our school will look, feel and operate in a very different way to what we and the children are used to. It is impossible for us to remove all risk of the virus spreading, particularly as we are working with young children, and so we will need to be working to try and maintain social distancing and limiting interactions whenever possible.

We do have a significant number of staff members who are already unable to be present on site due to personal circumstance, health concerns or due to the health of their close family members. As a result, we are already working with reduced staffing numbers and this could further be impacted if staff have to self-isolate due to themselves or someone in their family presenting with symptoms. Our plans will need to be fluid and flexible and we will need your patience and understanding that we are doing the very best in the circumstances. This is not a situation any of us trained for or expected and we have to ensure that we manage the risks associated with the current situation. I must be honest and say that, should staffing levels become so low that we cannot safely support our children, or should the associated risks increase too greatly, we will have no other option but to close High Hesket CE School, regardless of the government's announcements.

At this point, it is simply not physically possible for us to open our doors to all of the proposed year groups in one go and it will also be highly unlikely that we will be able to invite all the proposed year groups back before the end of term; we do not have the space to do so. Children must be organised into smaller groupings and we do not have enough staff or classrooms to enable all children in the identified year groups to return alongside a significant number of Key Worker children. Following our survey to parents, we have much higher demand for Key Worker places than we were expecting and so to begin with, **WE WILL ONLY BE ABLE TO BEGIN TO OPEN TO CHILDREN OF KEY WORKERS ON THURSDAY 4TH JUNE AT THE EARLIEST.** This is subject to review right up until the last moment. **Please be aware that this could still change and that plans are still being risk assessed.** We will then be able to reflect on demand and safety, and may possibly open up to more of the identified year groups in a very slow and controlled manner. The situation in school will be monitored on a daily basis and reviewed at the end of each week.

It is important that any parents who are considering returning their child to school are clear on the measures that will be implemented across all year groups and classes and our expectations for everyone. As a result, I have outlined key measures below that we will be following to ensure we are in line with government guidance and to protect our staff and families. The government maintains that the safest way to limit the virus spread is through effective social distancing and to limit interactions. However, this poses great difficulty for schools where the make up and nature of

the setting is designed to encourage interactions between staff and pupils and many children, due to a wide range of ages and needs, will find this difficult at times and it will be impossible to guarantee social distancing will be consistent. However, we will be making a significant number of changes to ensure that social distancing practices are encouraged as much as we can which will change the normal make up of our school.

Procedures for the start and end of the school day

- There will be a staggered start and end to the school day with different entrances and exits assigned to different groups.
- Parents will not be able to be present on site unless by appointment. Children should be dropped by one parent only at the assigned gate.
- Parents will not be able to gather or meet outside.
- The school bus may not be running for those children who normally access it; the Local Authority will advise.
- Please consider walking or cycling as an option.
- When outside school, children and adults must remain apart from other families and be respectful of the 2 metre distancing requirements, including when walking to and from vehicles.
- On immediate entry to school, children will be asked to wash their hands. They will then be asked to repeat this at regular intervals through the day.
- At present, we are unable to offer Breakfast or After School Club.
- Children will not be able to bring in any items from home. This includes water bottles; a designated cup will be provided which will be cleaned nightly.
- Any communication with school should be done primarily by email. The office will be manned at regular intervals for telephone calls but, to assure a response, email would be preferable.

Classroom organisation and teaching

- The children will be organised into small groups of approximately 6-12 (this varies depending on room size). This group will remain the same every day and will be the group that they are with for all lessons, playtimes and lunchtimes; groups will not mix or interact. Each group will be assigned an area or room in which they will work. This will quite probably not be their normal classroom.
- In Key Worker groups, siblings will need to be in the same group. The groups will be mixed age and we are unable to accommodate requests for how groups are organised.
- Each group will have assigned adults who will be responsible for teaching and supervising the group to limit movement between the groups. This adult will probably not be their normal class teacher and may be a member of the teaching assistant staff. The number of adults assigned to groups across the week may vary depending on part time arrangements, staffing levels and availability.
- Please be aware that if we are unable to sustain staffing, it may not be possible for a group to attend for a period of time.
- The content of any lessons will be based on our home learning resources.
- Rooms will be organised to limit the amount of furniture and desks will be spread apart in order to follow 2 metre restrictions wherever we can. Most children will have a designated desk to work at and will also have their own stationery etc to use.
- Many of the normal resources, soft furnishings and toys will need to be removed, particularly anything that is soft or that is difficult to clean. Resources will be limited to essential items only.

Lunch times and playtimes

- Break and lunch times will be staggered and children will move around school and interact in their designated groups only at these times.
- Lunch will be served in their assigned classrooms.
- Due to limited staffing in the kitchen and due to protective measures, lunches will be provided but will be school packed lunches. These will be free to all children in receipt of Free School Meals. If you wish to provide your own packed lunch, the whole lunch will need to be provided in disposable bags or packaging.
- We will still need to endeavour to maintain social distancing at these times and will need to involve games and activities that can be done without the children being in close proximity.

General information:

- School uniform restrictions will be relaxed as we appreciate children may have grown out of items and we would like children to wear a fresh outfit each day. Please only send children in clothing that they are able to manage to put on themselves.

- Children will not need PE kit but should wear items that are suitable for being active, including to take part in short PE sessions.
- Our normal expectations relating to behaviour, child protection and general school conduct will apply but will also be adapted to take into consideration the changes implemented.
- If there is nice weather, a long lasting, high SPF cream should be applied to the children at home before the start of the school day.
- There will be no assemblies or any of the normal events we would usually plan to provide in the summer term (Sports Day, Leavers play etc).
- If school reopens to year groups beyond Key Worker provision, we may be unable to offer a full timetable in order to ensure we provide time for deep cleaning. If this is the case, children who are being taught in their year groups will be unable to join a Key Worker group for any additional sessions.
- We may need to wear protective clothing and face masks in some situations, particularly if we are involved in activities such as administering first aid or assisting children with toileting.
- Children who are in Nursery and who are registered at two different settings will only be able to attend one of the settings.

Illness

- **Any children who are unwell or who exhibit symptoms must not come to school.**
- We will need to be stringent in regards to responding if a child appears to be unwell in anyway. This can be very difficult for us as we are not medical professionals but we will need to be cautious and ask parents to collect any children who show signs of illness, no matter how mild. Government guidance on self-isolation will then need to be followed unless testing is sought that shows a negative result, in which case the child can return immediately to school.
- **If a child tests positively for coronavirus, their entire group will need to self-isolate for 14 days.**

Attendance

As you can appreciate from the outlined measures, school will be a very different place over the next few months and, for those of you with children in the identified year groups, you may feel that you would prefer to keep your child at home to minimise risk. Many of you will also have children split between home and school or may have health considerations to take into account; children who are clinically extremely vulnerable, or who are living with someone who is, should not attend. Please be assured that I am sympathetic to everyone's personal circumstances and you are under no pressure to return your child to school if you feel this is not the right time. The government have confirmed that there will be no fines issued for non-attendance and I will support any decision you choose to make at this time.

Home learning resources

We will still be providing our home learning resources for all children in the way that we have been doing; there will be little change in content or experience for those children who do return to school. We will also still be utilising our homework@high-hesket.cumbria.sch.uk email and Tapestry to maintain communication with all families and children. I'm sure you can appreciate that, due to the children in school being organised into small groups, staff will now be involved in teaching within school as well as preparing and circulating home learning so please be patient if there is a delay in answering any questions or concerns you may have.

Key worker children

As I mentioned earlier, **we are hoping to open to Key Worker children on Thursday 4th June 2020.** It is extremely important to stress that if the school becomes overwhelmed with pupil numbers, this will heavily impact on our ability to stay open and so will need to implement a number limit if necessary. Keeping our numbers manageable will assist in our ability to adhere to our social distancing measures. The school day will remain relatively similar to our normal timings although may be altered slightly to allow for staggered arrivals and departures (e.g. 8.45 – 3.15, 9 – 3.30 etc). **If you do need to access the Key Worker provision, please complete the attached form and send back to school at head@high-hesket.cumbria.sch.uk no later than 5pm on Monday 25th May 2020.** For those of you who accessed the Survey Monkey, this was to gain an idea of numbers and was not a firm commitment in case anyone's circumstances have changed. We will confirm attendance, start times and assigned entrances by Tuesday 2nd June 2020.

Of course, many of the above plans will need to be regularly reviewed and adapted. Many of you may have links to other schools and we would ask you not to make comparisons with what other settings are doing; every school in Cumbria has an individual circumstance based on size, number of classrooms and school layout etc. Until we have the children in and sessions underway, we are unsure as to how things will look in practice and it would be irresponsible

for us to move too quickly and put the health of our community at risk and undo all of the hard work everyone has put in over the last few months.

The next few weeks will take much courage, understanding and empathy from us all. I think it would be prudent for me to thank the staff at High Hesket CE School for their ongoing willingness to adapt and take on new challenges, and to yourselves as parents for the support you have shown over the last few difficult months. We are also proud of our children for their resilience and positivity when things are so strange and unusual for them. As always, if you have any queries or concerns, I can be contacted at head@high-hesket.cumbria.sch.uk to discuss anything further.

Yours sincerely,
Mrs A Harvey