

20th May 2020

To: All employees of Reach South Academy Trust
Subject: COVID-19 2019-nCoV, Coronavirus

Dear Colleagues,

Since I wrote to everyone on the 20th March, two-months ago, following the announcement by the Secretary of State that all schools in the country would close at the end of that week, the world has changed. In fact, our schools never closed. We have kept them all open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children on every working day, including the Easter holidays and bank holidays. Some schools, where the take up of EduCare was very low, combined with a neighbouring school. At Springfields, where the clinical needs of the pupils required it, the academy closed for a few days but then immediately re-opened to provide EduCare. Our academies have also provided EduCare for the children of key workers that are not on roll at our schools but, for whatever reason, could not access their own school. Our Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), Deputy DSLs and SENDCos have worked with all of your support to stay in contact with children that we need to go the extra mile to stay in contact with, and make sure that we support them and their families. All of you have achieved all of this while maintaining strict measures to reduce the risk of infection coming into the academy and also reduce the risk of infection spreading if it does get in. During the height of the contagion I am delighted that we have had no reported cases of infection within any of our settings. At the same time as operating an EduCare provision in all of our schools, all of you have also worked incredibly hard to stay in touch and provide high quality virtual schooling for the 96% of our pupils that are now home learning. The quality and energy of that work along with the care in terms of contact and feedback to pupils, has been outstanding. Thank you all for your dedication and enthusiasm that has made a difference for so many children and their families. Some of you have gone even further than that and volunteered to support the NHS on your rest days. You could not have done more.

Despite our best efforts during 'lockdown' we know that those efforts will always be a compromise for children. We are doing our best for every child that has had to stay at home but it is not as good as if we had them in school. Missing schooling for a prolonged period will have a negative impact on all children. The negative impact for children that don't have access to the same level of support, environment or technology at home, will be greater. The educational outcomes gap for children, through no fault of their own or their parents, from poorer backgrounds will be increasing. Many families are now facing real levels of poverty through job losses with many families resorting to the use of food banks for the first time. This type of poverty impacts on children's levels of anxiety and their physical health that will have long term impacts on their life chances. Indeed, poverty impacts on life expectancy in the longer term. This is one of the reasons that many of us came into education, whether as teachers or support staff, to make a difference for all children and

improve their life chances. Our challenge is to increase access for children to schools while keeping a safe environment for children to learn in and for us to work in. For this reason, the government has announced that during the half-term week, they will decide if they consider it safe to increase pupil access to primary schools and to a more limited extent, secondary schools. They have asked us to risk assess and plan to ensure that our schools would be safe enough to do that, if they decide to go ahead with the opening schools for more pupils.

Our view as a Trust is:

- We know that we can operate EduCare, currently with 5% of pupils in attendance and 74% of staff available to work on site, safely. We have done that for the last two months.
- We know that we are operating significantly below our safe capacity currently in EduCare. The question is, how many more children and staff could we have on each site and still operate safely? The Government have asked us if we could do that with Nursery, Reception, Year-1 and Year-6 back in primary schools if we have reduced class sizes and strict hygiene regimes. Our response is that we will assess that for each classroom and each school and carry out a comprehensive set of risk assessments, and only then be able to answer these questions.
- We can and we must extend the opportunity for children to come back to school as soon as possible, provided that it is as safe as we can make it, for both our pupils and our staff.

Yesterday, May 19th, our Board of Trustees met to consider our planning proposals and agree how we should proceed. Following that meeting I want to share with you all, how we are assessing if and when it is safe to bring more children back to school and how many children we will be able to accommodate safely.

1. The Trust has established a clear set of principles to guide us in assessing and preparing to bring more children back, that can be summarised as:
 - a. Keeping our pupils safe.
 - b. Keeping our staff safe.
 - c. Preparing with care and caution to have more children and staff in schools.
2. The Trust will ensure that the principles of social distancing are implemented throughout our academies:
 - a. Classroom floors will be marked out with 2m squares, with circulation space, to ensure that pupils and staff are able to maintain the 2m social distancing

- rule. The maximum number of pupils in each classroom will be determined by its physical capacity to maintain the 2m social distancing.
- b. Staff and pupils will be kept in a class 'bubble'. In other words, once adults and pupils are assigned to those class 'bubbles' they will stay with them and avoid mixing with pupils from other class 'bubbles' to reduce the risk of infection spread.
 - c. Class 'bubbles' will be staggered for the start and end of the school day so that they don't have to come into school at the same time as other 'bubbles'.
 - d. Pupils will have packed lunches that can be eaten in their classroom, or another appropriate safe place, so that they don't mix with members of other classes at lunch times. Break times will also be staggered.
3. Each school will operate strict procedures for maintaining hygiene levels and the use of the premises. A new Estates Management set of procedures and protocols have been issued. These procedures take account of all guidance from the DfE and Public Health England. The new procedures 'Estates Management for Academies Commencing Operation beyond Providers of EduCare' can be accessed on our web site at <https://www.reachsouth.org/covid-19> Please read through the new procedures.
 4. Children and adults with any potential symptoms of Covid-19: fever, cough or loss of taste and smell, will not be allowed to enter the building. Anyone developing any one of these symptoms while in the building will immediately be isolated until they can safely travel home. The new Estates Management protocol sets out how cleaning will be used to make rooms safe again in this scenario.
 5. Staff and children developing symptoms now have access to testing to identify if they have caught the infection. Staff or children developing symptoms must self-isolate for 7-days or until tested and confirmed negative. If tested positive, the individual of course must self-isolate under NHS England guidance. Where a child or member of staff test positive the children and staff in that class 'bubble' will all be sent home and asked to self-isolate for 14-days. The Trust will also immediately consult with the public health authorities for guidance on tracking and tracing of other individuals that the individual will have had contact with in the school and consider whether the school needs to close more widely.
 6. The Trust will book a test for any member of staff who has developed symptoms. Parents will need to book a test for their children.

7. Staff that have been identified as being able to carry out their duties from home, will continue to be asked to do so until further notice.
8. Staff in the shielded group will continue to work from home and contribute to our on-going virtual schooling.
9. Staff in the clinically vulnerable group and that have provided the necessary evidence to HR, under new government guidance should return to work if strict social distancing can be maintained. However, the Trust will support this group of employees to continue to work from home and contribute to our on-going virtual schooling. The Public Health England guidance included those over 70-years old in this group. The Trust will continue to extend that age range to those over 65-years old. Staff who live with a clinically vulnerable close family member, and have provided evidence of that clinical vulnerability, will also be supported by the Trust if they continue to work from home in June. This position will be reviewed at the end of June.
10. Office of National Statistics analysis has demonstrated that the risk to health involving Covid-19 is significantly higher among some ethnic groups. The reason for this is not yet known. If any member of staff from a black or other minority ethnic group is concerned about the risks of returning to work, please contact your Headteacher or the HR team. The Trust will support any member of staff from a BAME group who would like to alter their work practices to ensure strict social distancing, including continuing to work from home if necessary.
11. The Trust will take full account of DfE and Public Health England advice on the use of PPE. The current advice is that basic PPE is only required when working with someone who has developed symptoms in school. We have set out additional guidance in 'Estates Management for Academies Commencing Operation beyond Providers of EduCare' to include the use of appropriate PPE where staff have to deal with food preparation, first aid, intimate care, physical restraint, supervising isolation and carrying out symptom questions on daily admittance.
12. Over the past week, school leaders have been completing comprehensive risk assessments so that we can identify risks and ascertain the actions necessary to reduce those risks in each school. The health and safety aspects of those risk assessments are being reviewed and quality assured by our external risk management advisors, GS Musson Associates, to ensure that we have consistency of risk assessment across the Trust and identify any further actions that we need to take in each academy to improve safety.

13. Once the risk assessments have been completed and we are assured that the necessary hygiene and cleaning materials and the PPE set out in our new estates management guidance are on site, a triple signature certification will be required to allow each academy to take more children. The three signatures required are: The Director of Learning Environment; the Headteacher; and myself on behalf of the Trust. Our signatures are to confirm that we are satisfied that the premises, hygiene and social distancing arrangements fully comply with the DfE and Public Health England guidance plus the additional requirements set out in our own guidance.
14. We will be sharing our methodology and risk assessments with Trade Union representatives and their health and safety representatives and take account of their view.
15. If on May 28th the government decides that it is safe to open to a wider group of pupils, we will hold staff training days on June 1st and June 2nd for all staff that will be working in schools. On these training days we must continue to strictly socially distance. The purpose of the training days will be to ensure that we are all ready to receive more children, that we are confident with the new procedures including emergency procedures and that our socially distanced classrooms are ready. We will then admit the additional pupils on June 3rd if, and only if, all of our preparations are complete and we are ready to do so. If we believe that there is still more to do in any or all of our academies then we will delay the opening until June 8th.
16. We will only admit the numbers of children that can be accommodated in our strict 2m socially distanced class 'bubbles'. Unfortunately, we do not have the building capacity in most of our academies to admit all pupils that are entitled to EduCare plus nursery, reception, year-1 and year-6. We have been told by the DfE to prioritise EduCare and then EYFS and then year-6. This does mean that we will inevitably, in most cases, be teaching children in a different age cohort than we were on March 20th.
17. Finally, unless the Government decides not to proceed with the wider opening of schools on the 28th, our working rotas will come to an end next week. This half term we will support critical workers and run EduCare as we have done for the last two months. We will observe the half term break for Virtual School and all other school staff. School leaders will ensure that the EduCare teams on site next week receive a full week holiday at some point after half-term so that they don't miss out. We will all return to more normal working patterns after half-term. We will continue to provide EduCare on the week beginning June 1st regardless of whether we open for more pupils or not on the 3rd.

I would like to share with you some links to the government's guidance and evidence to support further opening of schools that you can read for yourself.

The latest version of the DfE guidance for schools is:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-school-closures/guidance-for-schools-about-temporarily-closing>

The overview of the scientific information that the government has based their consideration of wider school opening on can be found at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/overview-of-scientific-information-on-coronavirus-covid-19>

We continue in a state of a global and national emergency. We know much more about Covid-19 but there still remains a lot we don't know. We do know that the virus is still in circulation and represents a risk to us all. We know that strict hygiene regimes and social distancing can manage the spread of the virus, as we have seen over the last few months. We know that we have been able to operate EduCare safely over the past two-months. We also know that prolonged exclusion from access to schooling will have a profound negative impact on all of our pupils and for some, that negative impact will be devastating. We also know that the economic recession caused by lockdown is already having a negative impact on some of the families that we serve and in the longer term this will limit the life chances and life expectancy of some of our pupils and their families. We have to find a compromise to balance the risks to health of an on-going pandemic and the risks to health of an emerging economic recession. We cannot eliminate those risks and it is dishonest to say that we can right now. I do believe however, that we can, if called to do so, manage those risks so that we can bring more children back to school as safely as is possible under the current circumstances. I believe that we should do that and in doing it we have an absolute duty to keep ourselves as safe as possible. We cannot serve our pupils if we don't keep ourselves safe and healthy.

With very best wishes,



Dean Ashton
CEO Reach South Academy Trust