



THE PINES SCHOOL

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2<sup>nd</sup> June 2020

Dear families

I hope this finds you well, as we continue to work through these most strange and challenging of times. I think I have said it before, for many of us who have worked in Education for a while, this has been the most difficult period of our careers to date! It has been almost impossible to manage and make sense of the endless amount of guidance, the science, the statistics and it has been really difficult to make decisions based on the unknown, but we are finally starting to be able to piece it all together and make plans. The support of each and every member of The Pines community has made this a little easier, particularly for myself, and the messages of support and appreciation have really boosted morale and spurred us all on!

You will know that we have been working hard to try and establish ways of enabling our children to get back to school in a safe and well managed way. The Government provided guidelines that stated where possible we should prioritise Reception, Year 1 and Year 6, however the guidance stated that this did not have to apply in its entirety to special schools and that the school should retain the final decision based upon risk and need of the school population. Throughout this, I have always stood firm in my belief that until it was safe to do so, we would not be in a position to increase numbers or look at how to best do this. The well-being and safety of the pupils, staff and families is my main priority.

We are still not in a position to 're-open' to all pupils who would like to come to school. We will continue to offer childcare to children of key workers and our most vulnerable pupils as we have done throughout. In addition to this we are looking at being able to offer as many pupils as we can the opportunity to come to school, for 2 days a week. I appreciate that some parents may be disappointed and they would like their child to return to school full time, but we feel as a school community that this is a fair way to be able to offer some provision to all, and allows us to split groups further and ensure that we are as robust as we can be in maintaining social distancing and remaining alert to the virus. Offering part time provision also means that we can continue to support those families who have made the decision to keep their children at home.

Over the next few weeks we will be contacting parents to confirm dates when the children will be able return to school. Starting on the 8<sup>th</sup> June, we will be starting to welcome back those children in year 6 whose parents have stated that they want provision. Then we will be working on a timetable for the following weeks and will be in touch with parents accordingly. Please bare with us. We will put in requests to transport as pupils return, but we have no guarantee what this will look like or whether it will be a familiar route. Transport currently is operating and adhering to social distancing, but these measures will reduce capacity. As usual, transport is not controlled or managed by ourselves.



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As we have said before, things are going to look very different in school. We will post photos on Dojo over the coming days, but there are a number of things that we need to make you aware of and some new rules that we will be asking you as families to adhere to in order for us to maintain the safety of all. These are all based on the most recent local and national guidance. These are just the initial changes, I am sure they will evolve and move forward over time as our risk assessments continue to be reviewed and assessed.

**To best support the whole school community the following adaptations will be in place** (these apply for the increase in numbers, our existing key worker and vulnerable groups will remain as they have throughout with some adaptations in place)

- Children will be offered provision for 2 days per week, following a phased timetable that is risk assessed continually
- When coming off transport, children will be met by staff and taken straight into their classroom
- Upon entering school children's hands will be washed and children will be encouraged to wash their hands regularly during the day
- Class sizes will be reduced, with an absolute maximum of 7 children in an M class and 4 in an E class. This may change dependent on the pupils and their level of need. They will become bubbles. Each bubble will have a consistent classroom and staffing team for each week when they are in school.
- Where possible this will be with familiar staff
- Bubbles will not be able to join or work together
- Where practically possible, siblings will be placed in the same bubble
- The bubbles will have allocated toilets to use throughout the day
- Lunches will be served in the classroom
- Playtimes will be timetabled to ensure that at any one time there is only one bubble in the outdoor area.
- Classrooms will be modified with minimal furniture in, there will be no soft toys or furnishing in the classrooms.
- Children will have their own desk that is at least 2m away from others
- Sensory play will be available but we will be providing children with individual trays
- Resources, as much as possible, will not be shared
- External visitors to the school will not be allowed at the present time, this includes therapists, prospective families and work experience placements.
- We will be increasing cleaning throughout the day with door handles being cleaned at regular intervals.
- If someone within the bubble shows COVID19 symptoms, the whole bubble will be contacted and asked to stay at home until a test and the result has been shared
- It may be necessary to close bubbles if staff levels drop.
- Social distancing and good hygiene will be supported across the school through extensive signage, ongoing adult support and social stories and reminders.
- Parents will not be penalised if they choose to keep their child at home, this will **NOT** be an unauthorised absence.



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## To best support the whole school community staff will

- Continue to provide home learning opportunities for all children
- Continue to make regular contact with all children as they have
- Staff will adopt a more relaxed dress code than previously
- Follow the schools risk assessments at all times, including but not limited to
  - Following timetables for outdoor play and areas
  - Maintaining social distancing as much as is possible (although we recognise that this is going to be our biggest challenge)
  - Ensure handwashing is planned and regular
  - Maintain operational cleaning throughout the day for their bubble – ensuring where possible children are not sharing resources and any “mouthed” objects will be cleaned
  - Wear PPE as advised in accordance with risk assessments when working with children within their bubble who are unable to socially distance, who may spit or bite, when engaging in any first aid or personal care. Full PPE will include gloves, face masks and shields and aprons.
  - Stay within their bubble during school time and not enter other bubbles
  - Maintain social distancing with other staff in communal areas.
- If they or a member of their household becomes ill or shows symptoms of CV-19, they will not come to school. They will self-isolate for up to 14 days and be tested.
- Plan activities and experiences that allow the children to enjoy being back in school despite the new arrangements
- Most importantly we are fully committed to ensuring our children are as safe and happy as they can be when in our school.

## To best support the children and the school, we are asking parents that

- You monitor your child’s temperature and health before school and if there is any doubt that you make the decision to keep your child at home. During the pandemic we are asking that if you use over the counter medication such as calpol you keep your child at home as this could mask symptoms.
- Children come to school in clean clothes daily – it doesn’t have to be school uniform, but we appreciate that for some children uniform is a necessity.
- If your child, or anyone in the household, shows symptoms of CV-19, they must not come to school. Families should self-isolate for up to 14 days and be tested.
- If you provide transport for your child, we will be staggering the times to ensure that we can support parents in maintaining the social distancing.
- Apart from packed lunch (if not having a school lunch) and jacket we are asking that children do not bring any items into school or take any items home, from school. If your child needs nappies we will ask that you send these in once a week.
- If your child, or another child in the ‘bubble’, shows symptoms of CV-19 at school, we will be asking that you make arrangement to collect children as soon as is practically possible. We will continue to follow the usual guidance and procedures for other illnesses such as stomach bugs.



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Finally, can I reassure parents that a return to school for your child will be your decision. We will be happy to discuss your concerns in detail, but there will be no pressure put upon you from school to send your child into school if you do not feel that this is the safest and best option for you as a family. I am confident our arrangements will be as good as they can be and will reflect the strong values that we have always had at The Pines School. I am also hoping that in the coming weeks infection rates and deaths will reduce significantly and this will help to lower anxieties for us all.

Throughout this difficult time the staff have continued to be as constant source of support for myself as the Head, the leadership team, the families and each other. Everyone is keen to get back to normal, as I am sure you are too. We will not delay in moving forward to reopening school, but we will not rush or take any risks we can avoid.

I know that some people will be looking towards September and how we are going to manage transition, and this is also something that we are mindful of. We will be looking at ways to maintain some continuity for classes when they return and will share this in due course. This will include some virtual transitions, including videos and booklets to support this. We will also be sending out end of year reports as usual in July, however there will be no face to face parents evenings.

Many thanks for your ongoing support, I will update you via dojo and letters over the coming weeks.

Please continue to take care.

Best wishes



Emma



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