

# Preston Grange Primary School

Newsletter – May 14<sup>th</sup> 2020



## **Update: COVID19**

As you are aware, on Sunday evening the Government announced that schools would begin to open to children from Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. By Monday morning, they had also included Nursery in this plan. At this point, schools had not had any advanced notice of this proposal, and we were hearing this news at the same time as yourselves.

The 1<sup>st</sup> June is the date from when schools MAY be able to extend their opening arrangements. It is neither a fixed or hard & fast date by which all schools must open and there is NO requirement or obligation currently on any school to reopen to more pupils from that date.

Since the announcement, we have held a leadership team meeting, a meeting with the Chair of Governors & Vice Chair. We have updated the Governing Body, received advice & guidance from North Tyneside Authority and our teaching unions, regarding the proposal to re-open school to more children.



My own opinion on Sunday was of absolute sadness. Our school is a happy family, our children mix with each other right across school. The children are happy and confident, the pastoral system and atmosphere in our school allows children to thrive. School would not resemble anything near normal, and that is quite devastating to us all.

The health, safety, welfare and well-being of staff and all children is paramount. In order for us to even start considering opening school to more children, we have to be confident that it is absolutely safe for children and staff. We believe that we will make decisions regarding re-opening based on the best interests and safety of our children, staff and families. This may be regardless of what the government may wish.

Whilst we all want to be back at school with our children, it needs to be when it is completely safe to do so for all children, staff and families. Whilst reading that the government are prepared to gamble with our youngest children by bringing Nursery & Reception into school from as early as the start of June, staff were filled with sadness, outrage and anger. It saddens us to think that these young children, who will want to hug their friends, hold their hands and play together with them on

the yard, but they will not be allowed to. We won't be able to comfort them. As staff we cannot understand & do not agree with the rationale of the youngest children coming into school first.

We feel that it would be hugely detrimental to our youngest children's mental wellbeing, social and emotional development to have to keep them apart and split them over several classrooms. The curriculum would not resemble an Early Years curriculum; there would be no different areas of learning and free flow to the outdoors, no play, the classroom would have to be stripped of many of the resources and our youngest children expected to be able to social distance! We wonder if any government minister has ever set foot in an Early Years classroom. Clearly not!

In addition to this, the Government is asking teachers to look after up to fifteen 3 to 5 year olds (very unlikely to maintain distance or practice effective respiratory hygiene) when the Department for Education's Chief Scientific Adviser admits that the evidence is 'mixed' on the children's role in transmission.

Furthermore, considering the opening of Year 1 and Year 6 from 1<sup>st</sup> June; we have huge concerns about where we put these children. If we have to split all of the children into smaller groups of 15 or 10, bearing in mind the size of our school and lack of space, how would we manage this? Let alone the proposal by the Government that the rest of the year groups would all then come into school for a month before Summer, with all children being expected to social distance.

We have earned the Rights Respecting School bronze award, and feel that these conditions which we must adopt will completely affect the atmosphere of our school. Here are some photos of playtimes at schools in France since they reopened. This isn't what we want for our children, we can't do this to our children. It isn't what our school stands for, and what would this do to the wellbeing of our children?



Other considerations we must plan for is how we support the number of children who may find a return to school greatly upsetting or traumatic; some children may

possibly have trouble settling back into school, and into a school that doesn't resemble what they know. The wellbeing of our children is hugely important.

As part of being a Rights Respecting School, we adopt, follow and teach the United Nations rights of a child. There are 45 articles which outline the rights a child has. Article 3 sets out the 'Best interests of the child'. The best interests of the child must be a top priority in all decisions and actions that affect children. Therefore, in making any decisions about considering a return to school, we will make decisions based on the best interests of our children in addition to the safety of staff and children; not on what the government wish to happen.

### **Staff update**

We still have 5 staff as high risk, and on long term shielding. This has now been extended until the end of June. There are 3 members of staff living with vulnerable family members who are shielding. There have been 2 members of staff who have had Coronavirus, but thankfully are well. One of the members of staff who is on long term shielding is Mr Conaty, our Site Manager, which means that there are jobs that we are unable to do in terms of site maintenance until he returns at the end of June.

### **What would school look like?**

- Staggered entry and exit times to & from school
- No gathering of parents on the school site
- A one-way system introduced around school
- Classes split into groups of 10 or 15, with limited space in our school to be able to do this
- Staggered playtimes
- Staggered lunchtimes
- Staggered assemblies
- Classrooms stripped of many resources, tables split to seat children in separate tables
- Extremely restricted movement around the classroom
- No Castles curriculum
- No Read Write Inc
- No normal timetable or curriculum
- No interventions able to take place
- One teacher to stay with their group of children ALL day
- Children would need to social distance whilst playing
- If a child was hurt, first aiders would have to gown up to deal with the child
- Classes would have to be deep cleaned frequently
- Resources such as pencils, rulers, computers, sports equipment; anything a child touches, all need to be disinfected after one child uses
- The learning environments would completely change
- Very limited movement around school
- No dinner hall for lunchtimes (no mixing of children)
- Children would have to be able to social distance
- Frequent handwashing; outdoor sinks will possibly need installed
- Children would not necessarily be in a school group with their friends
- Access to the toilet would have to be managed

In addition to the above, children would likely have to attend part-time. A **possible** example would be that a class split into two; one half would attend on Monday and Tuesday, then the classroom would need to be deep cleaned. The other half of the class would attend on a Thursday and Friday (This is only an example). Another issue is the space that we have in our small school. We have Nursery, plus 7 classrooms and a mobile classroom. It doesn't take a lot to work out that if we split classes into groups of 15, we have insufficient space to house all of the children.

### **In summary**

COVID19 has not gone away. The main key issue and concern is that we are yet to see any evidence that shows it would be safe to open school to more children after May half term – let alone to our youngest children!

We need to be 100% sure and confident that everyone will be safe. The late release of a really tight timescale with which we would be expected to make all of these changes to the school environment has caused sleepless nights this week. Staff are anxious and concerned about the lack of notice and the proposals to bring children into school and place them in groups of 15, expecting them to social distance. We are expected to make physical changes to school, bring more children into school, expose both staff and children to unknown risks, all whilst we are all unable to visit our own families yet.

Our staff want to be back at work; we miss the children and our jobs so much. But we all want to return only when it is completely safe. A timescale of 3 weeks is inadequate and impractical. A September return would allow us far more time to prepare all that we have to, in order to make sure school is a safe place.

We feel that we are not in a position to make meaningful preparations or finalise any plans for opening school at this time, as the DfE has not issued all the required guidance. Planning to re-open can only take place when the full information has been issued by the DfE. Currently, the government's guidance is incomplete, inadequate, and it lacks detail on a number of critical issues.

Remember though, that even when we are in a position to put plans in place, no final decision can be made by schools to reopen or extend the number of pupils in school. The Government guidance makes clear that *'We will only do this provided that the five key tests set by Government justify the changes at the time...'* and so, there are no guarantees that there will be any change to the current circumstances after 1<sup>st</sup> June. So, whilst considering the re-opening schools, it is somewhat irrelevant until all of these criteria and health indicators are met.

It is my opinion that in thinking about all of this, we have to think about the risks staff, children and families and our school community. Perhaps a philosophy of 'we do what we can do safely, or we don't do it' is needed at this time.

There is a great deal to put in place and to consider. I will keep you updated as and when we have any further information, guidance or decisions about how school will



proceed. In the meantime, I would be grateful if you would please complete the survey that Mrs Clarke will be emailing to all parents. Please complete one per child, as you may have children in more than one class. This will allow you to ask any questions or add any comments that you may have. We ask that all surveys are completed **by this Monday 18<sup>th</sup> May**.

Many thanks in advance, and thank you for the fantastic support and home learning that you have been doing with the children whilst they have been away from school! Please take care and stay safe.

Tracey Taylor, Headteacher, May 14<sup>th</sup> 2020