

Monday 22 June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope you and your families are well and are continuing to manage during this current phase of the lockdown. We very definitely feel as if we are betwixt and between at the moment as the government continues to announce partial headlines that raise expectations and confuse in equal measure.

As you know, we have been giving very careful consideration during the last few days to whether or not we could open to any more children from Year 2, 3, 4 and 5. The government said previously that they would all come back for a month before the end of term, then they said they couldn't, then they said some might be able to return if schools had the capacity. All very confusing for children, their families and for us!

We received some additional guidance this week which we have considered very carefully and we have concluded that unfortunately we cannot bring back any more children from these year groups as we are already at full stretch and are either at, or close to, our maximum capacity. I imagine that some schools will have spare classrooms and additional staff to be able to bring back more of their children but that is not a position that we find ourselves in at Woodloes.

The current guidance says that schools should only welcome back additional children where:

- They have already made provision for children of critical workers, vulnerable children, and children in Nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 and have ensured as many as possible are able to attend.

We are currently operating 16 groups and have over 150 pupils in school, over a third of the total number on roll. I have read that nationally only 11% of primary aged pupils were attending school, so I can understand why there is a view that many schools might have the capacity for more children to return.

The guidance also goes on to say that schools must continue to follow the procedures set out in the protective measures guidance. The health and safety of our children and staff is our main priority and we are continuing to implement all of the procedures that are making the school environment safe at the moment. Children and staff are working in bubbles of no more than 15: these bubbles have a fixed membership, including the allocation of staff and this ensures we are limiting the amount of contact as much as possible. It was suggested by the Minister for Education, that bubbles might be extended to 30 to enable all pupils to return in September but this has yet to be confirmed.

Additionally, the guidance also says that schools should not incur additional costs to provide staffing or classrooms which prevents us from bringing in any additional agency staff. This is significant, as we have 6 teaching staff unable to work in school under the current restrictions and every member of staff is already allocated to a group. We therefore do not have any more staff to create any extra groups.

Given that we are currently at full capacity, we could have considered having groups of children in on a rota but the government guidelines specifically advise against this indicating that schools should only offer places on a full-time basis.

We have discussed our plans and our capacity in detail with the directors of the Trust and they have agreed that we have no further capacity to welcome back any more children. Interestingly, they have also informed us that we already have more children in school than any other schools in the Trust, including secondary schools. Additionally, they have said that we should try to preserve some capacity to continue to support our increasing key worker numbers and to cover any staff who might fall ill.

For us and for many of you, this is not the outcome we were hoping for. We have considered this very carefully to see if there is anything more we could do but the reality is that we are already running more groups than usual, with fewer staff and the restrictions we are under limit our ability to create additional capacity. Personally, I am sorry and disappointed that we can't have more of our children back in before the end of term!

We have 4 weeks now until the end of term. The current indication is that there will be a 'summer holiday' but we have no details yet about what this might entail. We are very keen to ensure we do as much as we can for our children in school and at home and we are currently developing plans that will hopefully enable all our children to have some contact in school and to meet their next teacher. More details on this will follow shortly.

As we know, this is a rapidly evolving situation and there is already discussion about a relaxation of the 2M social distancing rule to open up the hospitality industry and pave the way for every child to return to school in September. Like you we will be watching the daily briefings carefully and will do whatever we can to help in the coming days and weeks and we will continue to plan for what we hope will be a more 'normal' start to the school year in September.

If there is anything we can do to help please do not hesitate to make contact. In the meantime, best wishes to you and your families – stay well!

Yours sincerely,



Andy Mitchell (Head Teacher)