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CEO: Mrs C Dickinson

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Dear Families,

I am sure that you will have heard the update that was announced about the government's change in their aspiration to enable all children to return to primary schools for four weeks before the end of the summer term. I do not think that any school leaders were surprised by this as the restrictions of numbers, with the bubble approach, always meant that we would not be able to take back all the children. We, like you, are disappointed that our children are still not able to return to school.

There have been some letters and emails from families in different academies expressing concerns about the reopening of our schools. This has been a challenging time for everyone, and I would ask that you consider how your questions are worded to show respect to our staff. All staff have worked extremely hard throughout the pandemic – providing home learning through technology, supporting families and caring for keyworker children. It has not been helpful for parents to blame the staff for the position we find ourselves in. As I wrote in my last update, Michael Gove informed us that any questions that you may have about government policy should be directed to him.

All schools are working hard to ensure that we open, taking care that children and staff are all kept as safe as possible. This is why groups of children have been introduced slowly and this enables both children and staff to be confident with procedures in this "new normal" and to stay healthy. Our schools' circumstances vary depending on their physical capacity, the numbers of staff that are available to be in school and the number of parents who want their children to return.

We are meeting regularly with other local heads, MAT leaders and Surrey's Education department. This has given us a good picture of what is happening across Surrey and in other counties. Infant schools are **all** experiencing difficulties in being able to take back all children in the year groups that have been stipulated. In our local area, none have managed to take back all the children wanting a place and indeed in some, it is only children of key workers who have a space.

Our small infant schools are in the most difficult position because they have been asked to take back over 2/3rds of their children in maximum bubbles of up to 15 children, therefore, with the capacity of only half of the children on roll. The other schools that are finding it difficult are small primary schools, particularly those with nurseries. We hope to be able to offer places to our Year 1 children w/c 15th June in all academies except Cross Farm and Sandringham, both of which are at full capacity. We then hope to offer places to Year 6 children at our Primary schools. Please can I remind you to complete the survey for your year group as soon as it is sent to you to ensure that you can get a place for your child. There have been several key workers that did not complete the survey and missed spaces as schools have filled up. We will endeavour to take back all the children whose families have requested a place in these year groups but are limited to spaces in some settings.

Home learning will continue throughout this term and, for those year groups who are back in school, will generally reflect what is planned for children *in* school. For those children in Years 2,3,4 and 5 who are not returning, the learning planned will be delivered to the keyworker children in school and will be provided for the children who are still at home. Many staff are delivering lessons to a different year group of children in school while, at the same time, planning for their own year group who are still at home. This means that staff workload is much greater and there will be a reduced capacity for 1:1 contact with children at home. Now we have clarity that these children will not return



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before September, we will endeavour to give some virtual contact to those children not being offered a place in school before the end of term. Please bear with class teachers who are keen to maintain this contact but are trying to fit it into their working day.

There have also been some questions about why we are not providing live lessons online. There has been a great deal in the media about this but we, like the majority of other local primary schools, have decided not to do this. The classroom experience cannot be replicated by a live video lessons but there are further reasons:

1. The Education Endowment Foundation states that “Collaborative Learning” is a highly effective teaching and learning strategy which cannot be easily replicated in video lessons and the National Education Union (NEU) stated, “online lessons are not desirable for primary children as the teacher-pupil interaction is not easily replicated.”
2. Pressure on parents and children through the pandemic – live lessons mean specified, timetabled ‘live’ learning slots that put extra pressure on families and mean many children miss out.
3. Safeguarding and Health and safety concerns – for both children and staff.
4. Engagement and Access for All - many children do not have access to high quality internet or an appropriate device to access to live video lessons. Indeed, many may be sharing devices with other siblings or parents.
5. Teachers’ role through this pandemic – all our staff have been creating Home Learning activities for families with and without technology. They have tried to make activities engaging and interesting for the children, give some choice and also recommend further ways to support your children. Many have been coming into school and working with the Key Worker Children which has required further planning. They have also been supporting many families who have had significant challenges during lockdown. More recently they have been planning for the new government guidance to support some of our children back into school. In addition, many have their own children at home and some have been supporting family members who are extremely clinically vulnerable. It has been neither practical nor sustainable to be leading video lessons and we have a duty of care to staff as well as for your children.
6. Teachers are not available to do live lessons for their own year group of children since many are teaching in bubbles.

Arrangements for September are currently unclear. Despite teaching unions’ best efforts in asking that the government briefs schools in advance of their announcements, we only hear about arrangements at the same time as you do. Once we are clearer about arrangements for the new academic year, we will update you. Similarly, we are working with local junior and secondary schools to organise inductions for children to their new schools. These, with inductions for our new children into Reception will probably not happen until September, but we are considering ways of making some contact with our new children before the summer break.

I understand that the children not being back at school has caused anxiety to families but would urge you to continue to work in partnership with your school to support our children. Thank you for your support during these difficult times, the emails of support have been very much appreciated.

Yours sincerely



Christine Dickinson
CEO, The Kite Academy Trust