



## St. Mary's Catholic Primary School, Birchley

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Headteacher: Mrs Andrea Hymers, B.Ed.(Hons)



Dear Parents/Carers

I am sure that after the Prime Minister's statement on Sunday regarding the opening of school for Reception, Y1 and Y6, there are lots of questions that you have. On Monday, the government released further guidance, but this new guidance has still left us, as a school, and the local authority with lots of questions which need clarification too!

### **What is the current situation?**

At the moment, for us as a school, there is no change to the current guidance. We will continue to provide care for the children of key workers, those children who are vulnerable and those children with an EHCP. The overriding message is still that, for now, it is safer to stay at home.

### **What is the current government guidance?**

The current guidance is suggesting that if the government feel it is safe to do so, then the children in Reception, Y1 and Y6 will begin a phased return to school, from the week beginning the 1<sup>st</sup> June.

St. Mary's, along with several other schools in the LA, had already planned a two week break at Whit this year and this holiday pattern will remain, so for our children, their phased return would begin week beginning the 8<sup>th</sup> June and not the 1<sup>st</sup>. (School will remain open for the key worker/vulnerable/EHCP children.) Guidance also states that the children be taught in groups of no more than 15 and that those children are not allowed to mix with those from other groups. There is also no expectation of 2m social distancing, although the government has suggested other measures e.g. the removal of soft furnishings, equipment not to be shared unless it can be easily cleaned between use. As you can imagine, this presents its own issues regarding COVID safety and young children.

### **What is the school doing to prepare for June 8<sup>th</sup>?**

Our senior leadership team have spent the last few days making embryonic plans towards a phased return. These plans will not be finalised or shared publicly until we are sure that we have the right plan for St. Mary's. However, I do want to share our current thinking with you because we are a school family and I believe that you need all the facts about the direction which the government wants us to take.

Things to note:

- With the number of small groups (no more than 15 per group) that we need to offer, we cannot guarantee that all children will be looked after by their own class teacher. Some groups may need to be looked after by a teaching assistant - there are simply not enough teachers to go around if class sizes are halved.
- It is highly unlikely that all children will be in their usual classroom base – we do not have 2 classrooms per year group and the advice is that teaching groups remain in the same base during the time that they are in school.
- The school day will need to look very different. Playtimes and lunchtimes will need to be staggered as will start and finish times. Resources will be limited to those that can be used safely.
- The curriculum we deliver will not resemble our usual one. Our primary focus will be upon the children's health and well-being. They will be coming back to a very different school day and may feel anxious. Reading, writing and maths will then become our focus.
- In addition to our Rec, Y1 and Y6 children being in school, we will also need to continue to offer care for the children of our key workers, those that are vulnerable and those with EHCPs.
- Teachers will continue to set and support online learning for those year groups/children not able to return to school.

### **What will happen next?**

Please be assured that we will not re-open school for the specified year groups until we are fully prepared. Our plans will be based on what we as a school community need and want – it may be very different to other schools in the local area. Our approach will be an extremely cautious and measured one – one that will hopefully protect our children, staff and families.

Bearing in mind the points above and the official guidance, I want you to know that we miss you and your children, and do want to welcome them back to school as soon as it is safe to do so. We remain committed to helping our school community feel safe and secure as we move forwards.

If, you as parents, decide that the situation in school is too concerning, please be reassured that, as a school, we would absolutely support you in your decision to keep your child/ren out of school. Although the government is strongly encouraging you to send your child/ren back – it is not mandatory. No fines will be issued and school will not be held accountable for attendance during this time.

If your child does return to school (further details to follow once plans are confirmed), they can return wearing their own clothes. We do not feel there is a need for you to buy summer school uniform for the relatively short time left in the school year. We will try to spend lots of time outside of our classroom bases – in the fresh air, so outdoor clothing is most appropriate e.g. tracksuit, trainers, joggers, shorts etc.

All that we ask is that, if possible, you send your child into school with their own named pencil case with a pencil, sharpener, rubber, ruler, glue stick, scissors and coloured pencils inside. This will help us to ensure that the children are not using shared resources. It would be practically impossible to clean coloured pencils etc. after every use. If you are unable to provide this for your child/ren, we will put together a plastic wallet of resources for them, but our resources are limited and we would really appreciate it if you could help us with this.

The speculation in the press and on social media will now be about how schools can safely open (or whether they should open at all before September), and it will intensify over the next two weeks. As, always, at St. Mary's, we take the view that we need to consider all of our actions and communications to parents and children carefully, before making decisions. These decisions will always first and foremost take into account the welfare and well-being of staff, pupils and parents in our school.

Until then, please do not compare us to other schools – we are unique and will make decisions based solely upon what is best for our school community.

In order to help us to move forward, can we please ask parents of children in Rec, Y1 and Y6 to contact school via email at [stmaryrcbp@sthelens.org.uk](mailto:stmaryrcbp@sthelens.org.uk) to let us know whether or not you will be sending your child into school if we were to open on a phased return after the 8<sup>th</sup> June. Please do still reply if you do not intend to send your child into school.

As always, if you need to speak to school, please do not hesitate to phone or email. We will get through this difficult period together as a family, with the love of God.

Take care everyone and stay safe.

*A Hymers*

Mrs Andrea Hymers  
Headteacher

