

Holding Hands with Jesus as we love, learn and grow together



St Columba's Catholic Primary School

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LA/DfES Number: 340/3357

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14th May 2020

IMPORTANT UPDATE REGARDING GOVERNMENT PLAN FOR WIDER SCHOOL OPENING

Dear Parents and Carers

Once again we are writing to you as a group of schools with some further information regarding the recent government announcement concerning the potential opening of schools to additional year groups. We would like to reassure you that as a group of 23 local Knowsley schools we have been very much working together, whilst taking note of national and local guidance, to try to find a way forward which is safe for both our children, our families and of course, our staff. We have a duty of care to safeguard all of the school community.

Over the past few weeks all Central Collaborative schools have been supporting the families of key workers and some other children with the provision of emergency childcare during the school week and also during the Easter holiday period. In addition, teachers have been busy providing a wide range of home learning activities for your children which have had both an academic and a wellbeing focus. Lots of families have shared their learning and activities and across the whole Central school community we have loved receiving your feedback and videos. Teachers and other staff have also enjoyed keeping in touch with families and this has been a vital part of maintaining school / pupil relationships during this difficult time. We recognise that home schooling is by no means an easy task and we thank you for your incredible support and hard work!

What has the Government asked schools to do?

This week, against a backdrop of over 31000 deaths due to Covid 19 and a slight easing of the current 'lockdown' procedures, schools were asked by the government to begin preparing for a partial return to school of children from the year groups Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6. This was in recognition that children do need to return to school at some point and also to support parents and carers in returning to work. The Government have made clear that schools will only open if the five tests they have stipulated have been met. These five tests are:

1. Protect the NHS's ability to cope. We must be confident that we are **able to provide sufficient critical care and specialist treatment** right across the UK.
2. See a **sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rates** from COVID-19 so we are confident that we have moved beyond the peak.
3. Reliable data from SAGE showing that **the rate of infection is decreasing to manageable levels** across the board.
4. Be confident that **the range of operational challenges, including testing capacity and PPE, are in hand**, with supply able to meet future demand.
5. Be confident that **any adjustments to the current measures will not risk a second peak of infections** that overwhelms the NHS.



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Schools received this information at exactly the same time as the rest of the country during the Prime Minister's briefing on Sunday evening. Headteachers immediately began to consider plans as, like yourselves, they want nothing more than to have children back in school learning and socialising with their friends. The government produced numerous documents detailing the actions schools would have to take prior to increased numbers of children returning. Some of these measures included:

- reduced class sizes to adhere to social distancing. All of our schools have now checked their classroom sizes and most can fit small groups at any one time, for example, between 5 and 10 children maximum
- children to remain in the same group at all times with no mixing
- children to have the same teacher all the time
- increased hand washing facilities
- separate entry and exit points
- no parents / carers allowed on site
- one way systems to be established in schools
- reduced timetable / flexible days / staggered start & finish times
- home schooling resources to continue to be available
- desks to be positioned 2m apart if possible
- soft furnishings / toys to be removed from Nursery / Reception / other classrooms
- toys and equipment not to be shared
- small equipment which cannot be easily cleaned must not be used
- staggered breaktimes with no mixing of groups
- additional cleaning throughout the day and week

There are a number of other requirements but I am sure you can understand that the children's experience in school will be far removed from their usual routine and timetable. When we do open for additional children we will have a flexible approach to days and times which enables us to make the school environment as safe as we can and we will set out very prescriptive instructions which will have to be adhered to by all children and families. Even with all these additional measures in place, we will not be in any position to guarantee that both children and adults may not be exposed to the virus at some point in our settings. All of this will be a challenge for school staff, children and parents / carers, but, as always, when the time is right, we will do our very best!

What about Attendance during any partial opening?

We would of course like to see as many children as we can safely accommodate in school once the time is right. However, the Government guidance is clear: no school should penalise parents who decide to continue with home learning. Home learning resources and support will continue throughout any partial opening.

What will happen next?

Each collaborative school is now working on plans which have safeguarding as their main focus. These plans will take time to finalise so we can be sure about what is safely achievable and possible at this time. **At present, no date in the Summer term has been set for a confirmed wider opening of any of our schools.** Government guidance is continuing to be published daily and all schools will continue to work alongside each other, the local authority, academy trusts and trade unions to ensure that we welcome additional children into our schools at the most appropriate time. We will of course endeavour for this to be as soon as safely possible.

In the meantime, schools will continue to support the childcare of our Key Workers and other identified children as they have been doing since the onset of this crisis. Teachers will also continue to provide a wide range of online / home learning resources to ensure your children can access age appropriate learning activities. And of course, we will always keep the wellbeing of our children and families at the forefront of our minds through our regular phonecalls and social media presence. We will continue to support you all to the very best of our ability and capacity.



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When the time comes for more children to safely attend school, **your child / children's school will contact you directly** with further details and the next steps for you and your child / children.

In the meantime, we ask for your continued support and patience. Please look after yourselves and each other and if you need any additional advice or guidance, then staff in your school will always be willing to help. Please check individual school websites for contact details.

Warmest regards

Headteacher

Miss M Evans

Roby Park
St Margaret Mary's Juniors
St Margaret Mary's Infants
Stockbridge Village Primary
Lord Derby Academy
Malvern
Blacklow Brow
Central

St Anne's
St Aidan's
Hope
St Columba's
Sylvester
Park View
Knowsley Lane
St Albert's

St Aloysius
St Brigid's
Huyton with Roby
Willow Tree
St Joseph's
Alt Bridge
Meadow Park

