**Guiding principles for the wider expansion of special schools**

In May 2020 we produced some guiding principles for the reopening of special schools. Some 21 principles were proposed to focus our thinking in producing a phased expansion of our schools. This week we have seen an invitation extended to our YR, Y1 and Y6 pupils to return to school. Some have returned full-time and some on a part-time basis. Significant preparations for the safe expansion of our schools has taken place with risk assessments and other health and safety measures being put in place.

We as special school Heads have an ambition that more of our pupils should return to school before the summer break and crucially where it is safe for them and others to do so.

It is recognised that, in the end, heads and governors will need to make their own decisions and that there are bound to be differences in approach between our schools. However, we believe it would be mutually beneficial if our special schools adopted a similar approach on the key issues.

We have therefore revisited our principles in an attempt to give clarity to our approach.

Principle 1: We will follow government guidance in our invitation to wider groups of pupils where this is appropriate and safe to do so.

Principle 2: It is our ambition that all pupils within our schools will be invited back into school before the summer break whilst recognising the need to focus on the children of critical workers. However we are aware that a significant group will not return because it is not safe for them to do so or parents/carers might choose for them not to return.

Principle 3: We will look to expand the opening of our schools to all pupils from Monday 29th June. This may be over the period of a week. This is in line with the latest government guidance to try and give all year groups an ‘experience’ of school before the end of term which we feel is also important to support the mental health of our children

Principle 4: We will continue to adopt and update our common risk assessments for staff regarding fitness to attend work. This will include symptom identification and HR guidance regarding staff unable or unwilling to return to work. (This will be particularly vital for those clinically vulnerable staff who may wish to return to work and those with protected characteristics such as BAME staff.)

Principle 5: We will adapt and update our common risk assessments which will include visual risk assessments of pupils each morning and regular temperature testing if possible and if required.

Principle 6: We will adapt and update our common risk assessments for health & safety within our school buildings and grounds. (We will use the Implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings guidance as the basis for these risk assessments.)

Principle 7: The total number of pupils we can safely accommodate will dictate our provision and offer. This may be different for each of our schools and will take account of the availability of suitably trained staff being available. We will base our decisions on the fact that all of our pupils having EHCPs are entitled to return to school. Our timetables will be constructed around class sizes of between 2-8 pupils and classrooms will be organised appropriately. However each school will have its own unique challenges and these will be taken into account when constructing groups.

Principle 8: We will aim for a parity of offer within our schools in terms of physical time in school for each pupil. This may mean the reduction of time spent in school for some pupils of key or critical workers . This will be discussed with parents beforehand to ensure any changes support their working/living arrangements where possible.

Principle 9: We will ensure parity of expectation for staff in terms of workload as much as possible including requisite PPA. This will be based on total working hours either at home or within the school building.

Principle 10: We will use the knowledge and experiences we have gained from previously having pupils in school in preparing for the wider expansion of our schools.

Principle 11: We will ensure there is rigorous, regular and ongoing cleaning of the school buildings to maintain government guidelines for safe working. Strict cleaning and hygiene guidance is already being observed.

Principle12: We will follow government guidance around PPE but allow staff to make personal decisions on the wearing of personal face coverings. PPE used as part of the usual care routines of the schools will be provided for staff. Risk assessments will take place to identify any specific staff who need specific PPE i.e. first aiders to carry out their role, BAME staff.

Principle 13: We will relax the requirement to wear uniform to reduce risk of contamination posed by the repeated wearing of the same items between washes.

Principle 14: We will work with transport section to devise risk assessments for the transportation of pupils to and from schools. We will look to work with transport section to ensure pupils are safe on these vehicles. Where possible parents will be encouraged to 'drop-off' and 'pick up' their child.

Principle 15: We will adopt a flexible approach to the school day including lesson length, staggering break and lunch times to minimise any mixing.

Principle 16: We will continue to provide a packed lunch with some hot element for part of the week. Provision of FSM will be in place.

Principle 17: Teachers, support staff and pupils will form 'bubbles' for all of their time in school. Movement between bubbles will be discouraged as far as possible.

Principle 18: We will cancel all large, non-essential physical gatherings of staff or pupils

Principle 19: Non-essential, external visitors will not be allowed into the school for the foreseeable future. However we will be mindful of colleagues from other services who may on occasions want to use our toilet facilities. This will be added to the school risk assessment.

Principle 20: School performances, visits, shopping trips, sports practices will be postponed until greater social contact is possible.

Principle 21: EHCP Annual Reviews will continue by either virtual means or by telephone.