



Menston Primary School

St Peter's Way, Menston, West Yorkshire. LS29 6NY

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Headteacher: Iain Jones BEd (Hons) NPQH

Thursday 21st May 2020.

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope that you and yours are safe and well. I am writing to share with you our school's phased reopening plan as it stands at 3pm today. There has been much debate in the media about the return of more children into schools and much disagreement. Ultimately attendance is a decision for families, and the school will respect your decision. **You will not be penalised if you choose not to send your children to school as we begin to reopen.** We plan to start a cautious return of more children to Menston from Monday 8th June with the reintroduction of smaller groups of **Year 6 children** - our oldest children. Once we are satisfied that the measures and provision we have in place for Year 6 are working safely and smoothly we will make more specific plans for other year groups to return.

As you can imagine, planning for the reopening of school is difficult and complex. Over the last few weeks we have worked with leaders in the ten local schools in our Two Valleys LAP (The Local Area Partnership) to develop plans to reopen. The plans have been written many times and have had to be amended many times because the situation is fast changing, unpredictable and fluid. Our jointly conceived plans have been agreed by the Chairs of our Governing Boards and, collectively, we feel this phased approach is the best offer that can be made for our pupils and communities at this time.

We are continuously reminded that for schools to begin to reopen to more pupils, the infection rate needs to stabilise and the death rate needs to continue to fall. On Thursday 28th May the government will decide whether the five 'key indicators' have been met.

On Tuesday Cllr Imran Khan, Bradford Council's portfolio holder for education, employment and skills, issued a statement which included the following paragraph:

"Bradford Council has no intention of directing schools to open on 1 June or to force parents to send their children back and we are committed to working in partnership with school leaders, families and trade unions so that they can make sure their schools are safe environments for our children whenever they choose to open. Parents will not be fined if they choose not to send their children back to school at this time."

Councillor Khan expects schools to carefully plan for reopening by continuing to work with the Local Authority, with other schools, with staff and their professional organisations to formulate robust, sensible proposals. Schools will use their in-depth knowledge of local circumstances, staff, premises, children and families to make careful plans. Stringent health and safety procedures must be followed before any school is deemed safe to be open. It is worth noting that the rate of infection is currently high in Yorkshire and this is particularly the case in Bradford. This makes it essential that local knowledge underpins local decisions about whether and how to reopen.

Our on-going preparations for any potential reopening of the school include discussions between the Governing Body and the Leadership Team. School staff have met and discussed the options. We have also been in regular dialogue with other headteachers in the local area and with the

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Local Authority to share our thinking. Our approach to reopening has been planned jointly with other schools in the Two Valleys LAP. We have created a plan for Year 6 that could be replicated across other year groups, whilst being mindful of the classroom space and class sizes allowed under the current guidance. Therefore, from Monday 8th June we may begin a phased reopening of the classes at Menston Primary School, starting with Year 6. We have decided to bring back our oldest pupils first. We judge that Year 6 have the maturity and awareness to adjust to this new way of working and are the most equipped to settle into socially distanced schooling. We want to see how they get on before potentially rolling it out to the younger year groups suggested by the government. The government want schools to also reopen for Reception and Year 1 children. At this point I cannot give a return date for these year groups as it will depend on what we learn from working with Year 6. Given the very specialised nature of EYFS provision, I would expect them to be the last of these groups to return to school.

Our plan to bring back Year 6 in the smaller groups will be achieved with a rota system in which Year 6 classes will be split into two groups of no more than 15. One group will come into school on a Monday and Tuesday (group A) and be taught in class overseen by their class teacher and another staff member. A second group will be taught on a Thursday and Friday (group B). Classes will remain in these smaller groups (the so called 'bubbles') for the time that they are in school. The children will be taught for two days and also prepared for their three days of home learning. On the Wednesday, classrooms and school will be deep cleaned and teachers will prepare and plan for home learning for all year groups.

All families need to familiarise themselves with the attached Phase One Plan. A separate letter will go out to Year 6 families with more detail. Once you have those details we need Year 6 families to tell us if they will be sending their child/ren to school so that we can finalise our plans. You can do this by emailing; office@menstonprimary.co.uk. You must do this by Friday 29th May. If the model for Year 6 proves to be successful and safe, this model can then be rolled out to other year groups. The same structure would apply to the other year groups with half the class being taught in school on a Monday and Tuesday and the other half on a Thursday and Friday, with three home learning days across the week.

This week I have met with many members of our staff and though they are understandably worried by this increase to their level of personal risk and the risk to their families, they are ready to make this plan work and take the first steps back to some kind of normal.

Lunches, provided by the school as 'grab bags' will be eaten in the classroom and children will access their designated outside space in their groups, whilst retaining social distance. Playtimes and curriculum time will not be as the children are used to, with the children playing and working at a distance from their peers. Certain sports, activities, team games and the use of some play equipment will not happen due to social distancing.

We will also be running a staggered start and finish time to the school day to reduce contact between the groups of children, parents and staff. Over time we will use several different entrances in order to help with social distancing (more detail will follow). Please take some time

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to explain to your child or children what we mean by social distancing and practise it before they come into school.

The decision on when and if we can bring back more classes/year groups will be made in the light of our experience and ongoing risk assessment. Parents will be informed in a timely way to ensure adequate preparation for returning to school.

Alongside the reintroduction of the Year 6 children the school will continue to provide emergency childcare for the children of Key Workers. However, parents of children currently accessing emergency childcare in Year 6 will need to decide whether to continue to access this emergency childcare or whether to opt instead for the two days of rota class teaching. They cannot access both. This is to avoid children being exposed to two different groups or 'bubbles' in school and thereby to give less chance for the virus to spread.

It has been difficult to think through the best course of action to keep children, staff and families as safe as possible in this unprecedented crisis, but I hope that this controlled return will provide confidence to the school community that we are considering the best and safest course of action for everyone.

In order for school staff to plan for the return of Year 6 we need to know which children to expect on Monday 8th June. We will send further details of our plan to Year 6 families in the next few days. When families have received this further information, please can they email the school office by Friday 29th May and make clear whether you do/do not intend to send your Year 6 child/ren back to school.

Yours sincerely,

Iain Jones
Headteacher

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