

St. Catherine of Siena Catholic Primary School

Headteacher: Ms Nicola Kane LLB.PgDip, PgCert.

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Email: admin@st-catherine.herts.sch.uk

www.stcatherinescatholicprimaryschool.co.uk

Horseshoe Lane
Garston
Watford
Hertfordshire
WD25 7HP

18th May 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Coronavirus Update

School Return

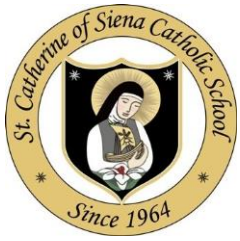
As you are aware, last week the Government made an announcement regarding the potential for phased school reopening for certain year groups, from 1st June onwards. Since then, the Department for Education has been issuing guidance on a daily basis. I have been involved in extensive talks with our Trust (DOWAT); our Health and Safety advisers (Ellis Whittam); our solicitors (Winckworth Sherwood); all the Heads in the Watford area; as well as our SLT and Chair of Governors, regarding how to implement the Government's proposal, while keeping our pupils, staff and families safe.

Unfortunately, new guidance from the Government is coming in on a daily basis. I have been very reluctant to communicate a plan to parents, without the certainty that it will remain unchanged. However, whilst I still cannot provide a definitive 'road map,' I would like to outline the early stages of a plan to re-open St Catherine of Siena safely to the wider staff, children and community – because of course we have remained 'open' throughout the Covid-19 crisis for the children of critical keyworkers and vulnerable children.

In summary, the DfE has published guidance on the recovery strategy for re-opening schools as early as 1st June for children in nursery, reception, Year 1 and Year 6 with the ambition that all other year groups will follow before the summer holidays. The document states: 'We want to get all children and young people back into education as soon as the scientific advice allows because it is the best place for them to learn, and because we know how important it is for their mental wellbeing to have social interactions with their peers, carers and teachers. Children returning to educational and childcare settings in greater numbers will also allow more families to return to work.'

However, the guidance also stipulates that school leaders need to be mindful of exercising effective infection protection and control, and consider those who are shielding, extremely clinically vulnerable or are clinically vulnerable. The guidance is very clear that shielding or clinically vulnerable children are not expected to attend nursery or school and additionally, shielding or clinically vulnerable adults (including members of staff) are advised not to work outside of the home. Therefore, in order to effectively plan the safe re-opening of school, from perhaps as early as 1st June, we need to ascertain exactly how many staff are safely able to





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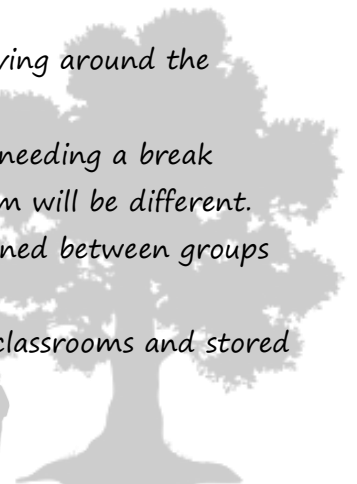
return to work, and those who are classed as 'shielding, clinically extremely vulnerable or clinically vulnerable,' and are therefore only available to work from home, remotely.

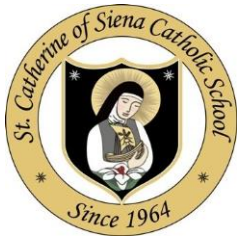
In addition, we need to consult with parents to ascertain your views on your child possibly returning to school and the feasibility of this, once you fully understand how the setting will operate for the final few weeks of term. Therefore, whilst I am sending this letter to all parents of St Catherine of Siena Catholic Primary School, I am currently only consulting with parents regarding their child in Reception, Year 1 or Year 6.

In addition to the critical keyworker group of children who already attend school every day, I would also like those for whom an additional vulnerability may now mean their child could attend school, to respond. I know that many key worker families have not, at present, chosen to send their children to school, but this may change after half-term. Similarly, some families may have become vulnerable as a result of circumstances related to Covid-19 and lockdown. Once I have the necessary information from staff and parents of these key groups, I will be in a much better position to plan the finer details regarding possibly opening school for some of these children next half term, if we deem it safe to do so.

You may have heard in the news that schools have received further guidance on planning for re-opening. These measures include:

- Class sizes of no more than 15 children in a room at any time – preferably taught by a class teacher but in the absence of teachers, taught by a teaching assistant (TA) under the direction of a class teacher (typically our classes have 30-34 children per class with one teacher and possibly one TA).
- Groups of children must NOT mix together or come into contact, and children within a group must remain 2m apart if they can. (This includes early years where it will be much harder for staff to enforce safely and consistently).
- Desks and chairs will need to be separated (2m distance between them) if possible.
- Reducing movement around the school grounds – each group is to stick to 1 room during their time in school, including during lunchtime.
- Staggering break and lunchtimes so groups are not mixing together / moving around the school at the same time.
- The daily timetable will need to be adapted to take account of all groups needing a break outside / lunchtime / handwashing & toilet facilities meaning the curriculum will be different.
- Toys and equipment should not be used by other groups and must be cleaned between groups using them (eg.in the case of EYFS children).
- Unnecessary items – furnishings and any soft toys will be removed from classrooms and stored elsewhere in school.





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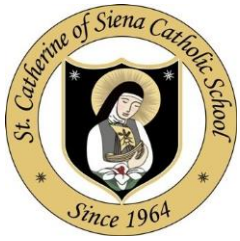
- Staggering the start and end time of the day to ensure parent groups are not able to congregate and reduce the need to enter the school grounds – therefore timings of the school day will differ for different groups of children so that children can arrive / be collected at different times. There will be strict protocols parents will be required to adhere to at the beginning and end of the day and adult to adult contact will need to be minimal.
- No visitors into the school will be allowed, including parents (only deliveries). This may prove particularly challenging for parents with children in Reception.
- Strict cleaning protocols will be adhered to throughout the day, including all staff and children washing their hands thoroughly with soap and water on arrival and before leaving the school grounds every day. Additional hand cleaning with hand sanitisers will be provided in all classrooms and used regularly throughout the day. Bins in classrooms, toilets and on the playground will be emptied regularly throughout the day.
- Classroom doors will be propped open and windows opened to ensure rooms remain well ventilated.
- There will be stricter rules regarding using the toilet – 1 child at a time to ensure no mixing.
- Outdoor apparatus will not be used by any group as this cannot be cleaned thoroughly between group use.
- Children will not be allowed to bring anything to school from home other than a coat/hat and will be wearing non-school uniform (shorts and t-shirt) to allow for daily washing of clothes. Water bottles will be kept on site and regularly sanitised. Packed lunches will be provided at school.
- Children will be allocated their own stationery pack and toy pack to keep at school. They must not share stationery or toys with others.
- If a child has a temperature/ cough / is feeling unwell they will be required to be collected immediately & if an adult becomes unwell, they will leave school immediately. Both children and adults will be required to self-isolate for 14 days, or until tested negative for Covid-19, (it has been announced today that the Government will now offer tests for COVID-19 to children over the age of 5).
- There will be numerous risk assessments carried out prior to school re-opening which will be reviewed daily.

The Government has made it clear that schools should not be operating on a rota basis.

“Schools should not plan on the basis of a rota system for pupils returning from 1 June, either daily or weekly. We are asking schools to welcome back eligible pupils full-time, and do not expect schools to implement flexible approaches, such as rota systems.”

They have stipulated that if we cannot open to the whole of Year 6, Year 1 and EYFS full-time at once, we should have fewer year groups, full-time. The above list of requirements is not exhaustive but should give parents some indication of how the school will need to operate as part





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of the governments Covid-19 recovery strategy so that you can make an informed decision about whether or not you wish your child to return to school this term. Please also note that siblings in other year groups will not yet be allowed to return to school.

I am very grateful to be part of the Diocese of Westminster Academy Trust. As a group of Heads, we have been working together to risk assess the situation and plan for reopening. The Trust has prepared a comprehensive Covid-19 reopening policy, 'Staying Safe In School During Covid-19 Draft Policy', for all schools within the Trust. The Trust is seeking feedback on this policy from all parents and staff members, by the end of the day on Friday, 22nd May 2020. Responses should be emailed to COVID19responses@DOWAT.co.uk. Links to all relevant guidance can also be found at pages 3 and 4 of the policy.

In order to enable any child to return safely to school this academic year, we have to make sure there are stringent risk assessments, in-depth checks and additional deep cleaning measures in place so that the school environment remains a safe place as reasonably possible for all children, staff and their families. As always, safety, not education, is our key priority. Based on the current risk assessment, the school will not be open to the whole of EYFS, Year 1 and Year 6 from 1st June. We do not have enough space, or available staff to socially distance 127 children plus key worker/vulnerable children.

Government guidance states:

"From 1 June, as more children return to schools, we appreciate that each setting's circumstances will be slightly different. Any setting that cannot achieve the small groups recommended as part of the protective measures guidance should discuss options with their local authority or trust. If necessary, settings have the flexibility to focus first on continuing to provide places for priority groups and then, to support children's early learning, settings should prioritise groups of children as follows:

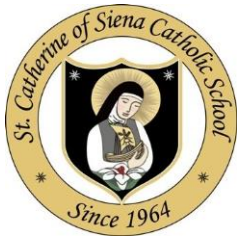
early years settings - 3 and 4 year olds followed by younger age groups

infant schools - nursery (where applicable) and Reception

primary schools - nursery (where applicable), Reception and year 1

I would love nothing more than to be able to open the doors of St Catherine's to all children once again and welcome all our families back into our school community. However, the scientific evidence is still not strong enough to enable the government to safely re-open schools fully. This means our school as we know it is going to drastically change for this half term at least and possibly for the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is imperative that staff, parents and children fully understand the changes that will be implemented and the role they will have in adhering to





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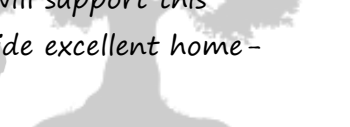
these much stricter rules in order to keep everyone attending school, and our families, as safe as possible.

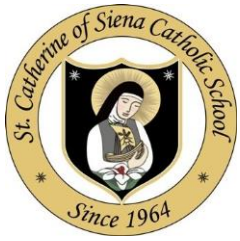
Many of you may already be feeling uncertain about sending your child to school (especially if older siblings are not attending). Some of you have got into a really good rhythm of home-learning and your child's mental health and well-being is flourishing being able to spend so much time at home with their family. It may be very difficult for you and your child to contemplate them returning to a new and very different situation than the one they are used to at school. Others of you may have initially felt relief that home-schooling may be coming to an end; thinking that you will be able to return to work every day and your children may be excited at the prospect of seeing their friends again. Although, now having read the finer details of the guidance you too may be feeling unsure about your child returning. Many staff are unsure and uncertain too. We would love nothing more than to see your children again and get back into the swing of teaching them every day in school, seeing them progress, sharing in their successes and enjoying spending time with them - but this is just not going to be the reality for the next half term at least. So, I would urge you to seriously consider whether you wish your child to return to school this academic year, knowing all the information I have been able to share and having given yourselves time to reflect.

Please also bear in mind that it will not be possible to run two different teaching curriculums for those in school and those at home and so the home-learning method will continue for all children. When they are in school, they will complete the same work as their home-learning peers under the supervision of a teacher or teaching assistant with social distancing rules being adhered to at all times. Following parental feedback, we will be moving to Google Classrooms from 1st June, for those who wish to use it. There will still be no obligation to complete any specific type of home-learning.

I fully appreciate this is an awful lot of information to ask you to take in at once - and this is just the outline. No pupils (other than/including key worker children) will be returning to school on 1st/2nd June 2020 - these will be used as staff Covid-19 training days. Returning to school after that is going to require staff and parents to work together. I would ask you to be understanding, to be flexible and to appreciate why we are taking the precautions and stringent measures that I have outlined above.

My priority is for all staff, children and their families to stay well and stay safe. If this means you choose not to return your child for the last few weeks of school then I will support this decision, authorise any absence and will guarantee we will continue to provide excellent home-learning opportunities for your child at home.





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Thank you in advance for taking the time to read this very long letter. I would appreciate those with children in EYFS, Year 1, Year 6 and Key Worker or vulnerable children to complete the short survey, indicating whether you will send your child in, if and when we open to that year group – this should also be completed by the end of the day on Friday 22nd May 2020. I will be issuing further information in due course.

In summary:

1. Please read and consider 'Staying Safe In School During Covid-19 Draft Policy' and email any feedback to the Trust email COVID19responses@DOWAT.co.uk by end of the day on Friday 22 May 2020.
2. If you have a child in EYFS, Year 1, Year 6, are a key worker or have a vulnerable child, please complete the short survey by the end of Friday 22nd May 2020, letting us know whether you intend on sending your child back to school once we reopen to that year group.

Finally, many teachers, myself included, feel despondent at the negative comments which are being made in the media about our commitment to the profession at this time. Teaching is our vocation. We are all totally and utterly committed to our Mission and St Catherine of Siena Catholic Primary School. I am incredibly proud to be Head of such an incredible school and I miss all our pupils. I cannot wait for the day that we welcome all our children back to school. I want them here and I want them learning. However, my priority is always safety; of our children, families and staff. The burden of how to catch up on pupils' learning is a heavy one, but it is nothing compared to the worry about a pupil, member of staff or family member dying as a result of my decision to reopen.

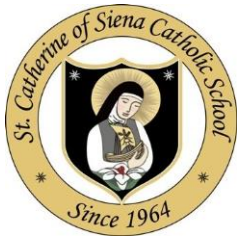
I am grateful that as staff, we have received nothing but backing from our parents. I'd like to thank you as a parental body for your kind messages, support and the understanding you have shown – it really does mean the world to us at this difficult time. Reading the feedback from the Governor survey was wonderful and really buoyed our spirits. I also promise that we will take on board the constructive feedback we have received and endeavour to act on it to improve the Home Learning experience.

Stay safe. Stay healthy. Stay in good humour. Stay sane.

God bless,



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