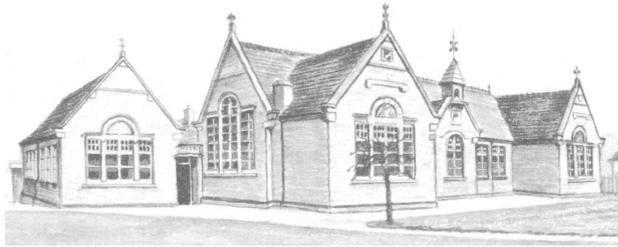


BEDFORD ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL
Hillgrounds Kempston Bedford MK42 8QH
Telephone: 01234 851011



Headteacher: Mrs L J Gould
E mail: office@bedfordroad.school

Thursday 14th May 2020

Phased Return to School Information

Dear Parents/carers

Further to my letter earlier this week, I wanted to provide some more information for you. I am sure that following the Prime Minister's statement on Sunday and my most recent letter to you regarding the opening of schools for reception, Y1 & Y6, there are lots of questions that you have. The government has released further guidance for parents and schools, 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 in school, there is **no change to the current guidance**. We will continue to provide care for those parents whose work is critical to the COVID-19 response and those that cannot be safely cared for at home. The overall message now, and in the future, is that it is **safer to stay at home**.

What is the current government guidance?

The government has provided their advice, it is inevitable that every school community will interpret it in their own way depending on their own individual circumstances. I am also taking the advice of the local authority and working with colleagues in other schools in the Kempston and Bedford area, but also Nationally to try and find some clarification and consensus to move forward. Please find the guidance by following the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>

The current guidance is suggesting that if the government feels it is safe to do so, then the classes of Reception, Y1 and Y6 will start to return to school from June 1st and this will be in addition to our critical worker children. It is also suggested that we have groups of no more than 15 children and those children are ideally not allowed to mix – the guidance recommends that they stay in the same group with the same adults. There is also no expectation of 2m social distancing, although they have suggested other measures. As you can imagine, this presents its own issues regarding COVID safety and young children.

What is the school doing to prepare for June 1st?

The senior leadership team have spent the last four days discussing our initial ideas and working with our local authority advisor to begin making plans towards a phased return, based on the latest government guidance. These plans will not be finalised or shared publicly until we are sure that we have the right plan for Bedford Road and one which follows the government guidelines. 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 that the government wants us to take.

We have been asked to have approximately 15 children in a group. Many of you will feel, like me, that those numbers won't be possible in some of our smaller classrooms. So some groups will need to be smaller than 15.

With the number of small groups that we will need to offer, not all children will be looked after by their own class teacher. Some teachers are still unable to return to school for medical reasons and therefore groups will need to be looked after by teaching assistants (who are all suitably qualified at Bedford Road). When I take into account the number of teachers that will be needed, there are simply not enough teachers to go around.

For this reason I sent home a survey to gain a rough idea of the numbers that do not intend to return the children to school before the summer break. Only when I have those numbers will I be able to work with the SLT to plan the way forward and see what is safe and possible to achieve. I know that for some of you your personal circumstances will mean you are not yet sure whether or when your child/children will be able to return to school, but if you have not sent back your survey response, please do your best to do so as soon as you can.

If we reopen, It is also very likely that children will not be in their usual classroom or with preferred friendship groups, or following the usual school timetable and structure. I know that this will cause anxiety for some pupils and parents. **Despite our very best endeavours, as a school, we are not going to be able to offer the known environment which your child left, although we will try our very best because we know your children.**

It is inevitable that any places offered will not be full time places, we simply won't have enough staff or rooms to accommodate everyone safely, especially if we are then asked to continue with the phased return of the rest of the school.

In addition to a phased return of Yr R, Y1 and Y6, the teachers will also need to continue to offer childcare for critical workers and online learning and support for other year groups (Y2, Y3, Y4, Y5). This will mean that whilst your children attend school, their learning will be the same as for the children who are learning at home. To clarify, the children who attend school will not necessarily have an advantage of returning early, due to the heavy restrictions we face by welcoming them back. Please also note that keyworker children are unlikely to be placed with returning children on June 1st and will stay as a key worker group.

What will happen next?

Please be assured that we will not re-open for the specified year groups until we are 100% prepared. I expect (and hope) that the guidance may be updated in the next couple of weeks to support this phased return, but until it is, we will work to make sure we provide a safe return by interpreting the guidance ourselves to suit our school. If we do not feel that school can reopen safely to the government's timetable, the governors may take the decision not to reopen the school until we believe it is safe - for your children and for my staff - to do so.

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. I 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, the school would support you in the decision to keep your child/ren out of school. The Government has clarified that there will be no fine for non-attendance.

The speculation in the press and on social media will now be about how schools can open safely (or whether they should open at all before September), and it will intensify over the coming weeks. As always, I 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 take into account the welfare and well-being of pupils, staff and parents in our school.

Once the school has made any decisions (following all government guidelines), we will let you know through our usual channels. It is likely that our plans will not be shared until the end of this month. It is also possible that our response may be different to that of other schools and that is because each school setting is unique and schools have to do what works best for them in the circumstances. It is also possible that what we are able to offer is different from what you are hoping for.

We will continue to keep contact with you and continue to support you in these very difficult and uncertain times. As always, if you need to talk, please do not hesitate to phone or email the school office – we will get through this difficult period by working together and supporting each other.

Yours sincerely

Mrs L Gould
Headteacher