Friday 15th May 2020

Parent/Carer

I am sure that since the PM’s announcement last Sunday you, like myself and all the staff at New Village, have had many questions and concerns about what the re-opening of school means. I wanted to take some time to share with you, in an open and honest manner, a little more information and offer you some details so that you are able to make the most informed and safest decision for *your* child. I apologise in advance for the length of this letter but the importance of its contents meant that it became lengthy: I urge you to read to the end.

As a Headteacher, I have great concerns about the wisdom of opening schools and welcoming children back into the school building from the 1st June; I believe I speak for all the staff when I share these concerns. I question the Government’s rationale in selecting the year groups identified and wonder about the thinking behind this. I am assessing the situation daily and am considering Government, Public Health and Local Authority advice and guidance as I receive it. I know the situation is subject to change, not least because of the R (infection) rate needs to remain below 1, which, according to Public Health England, is currently 0.8 in the North East and Yorkshire (currently the highest region in the country), slightly higher than the national average – this is of importance to us.

I also recognise that the school’s role is to serve the community and respond to Government directives. It’s true that we miss your children so very much and the role we play in their lives, we are eager to see them again… but not so eager that we would wish to put any of our children, their families or our colleagues at risk. As a parent you have a very difficult decision to make and I want you to have the facts.

I suppose the biggest question that you will have is; ***can I keep your children safe?*** Of course, this is our primary aim – our biggest and most pressing focus - and we are planning, preparing and reviewing things so that children and staff are as safe as possible in the school but, in reality, I cannot guarantee that the school will be a virus-free place and that the children or staff will not present a risk to one another or be able to socially distance effectively. I believe that for the older Year 6 pupils, staying 2m apart, is more achievable as they are able to understand what is being asked and, most importantly, why we are asking this. Of course, there will be times when they forget, or misjudge their position or have to pass one another in a part of school that isn’t wide enough to allow 2m and then the 2m aim is breached, but on the whole, it is more achievable. For those younger children in Year 1, Reception class or nursery, I believe that social distancing is nearly impossible and despite the Government stating that social distancing is NOT needed in primary schools, I believe that the safety of the children and the staff relies upon this. I can see from the parent survey that you agree with me on this matter. How we support a young child in staying away from his/her friends and not going near others is still a point of great concern for myself and the Early Years team. We need to balance the need to socially distance and stay safely away from others, against the emotional impact this will have on the children and their mental health development – it is a very difficult situation to manage. I also have the problem of PPE. If staff wear PPE to protect your children and themselves how does this look and feel to our children?

The usual school day will be gone – for now at least – and I dearly hope that by the beginning of the new academic term in September we have some sort of school normality. I can’t guarantee that your child will be in the same class as their friend, although we will try hard to keep friends together, nor can I tell you that they will be with their teacher. If we are to keep everyone safe and socially distanced, then we will have to have much smaller classes based on the space available in the room. What I can guarantee is that whichever adult your child has leading their group, they will be their doing their absolute best to make the day as nice as possible. We will need to change the start and end times of the day, so we can stagger families arriving and leaving and avoid a build-up of people whilst also working within a much-reduced week so that we can accommodate all of the year group safely and in the limited space we have. I don’t have unlimited amounts of space or staff to accommodate the necessary multiple, small groups but the options of larger groups who cannot socially distance is not an option for us.

Thank you to those of you who took the time to complete the online parents survey. It was incredibly useful to us in making sure we are aware of parents/carers thoughts and fears and address these in any plans we make. It was clear that you are unanimously concerned about the timing of schools opening and are undecided as to whether, when/if invited, you will send your child to school. I must emphasise that this is ***your choice***. There will be no fines for non-attendance. The Government has asked schools to strongly encourage parents to send their child(ren) to school so that parents can return to work. As the Headteacher of our school, what I *strongly encourage* is that you take time to make an informed decision based on facts and make a choice that is **best for *you, your family and your child***. I will support you in whatever choice you make.

I will send more information as we receive it and share with you the proposed plan once we have finalised the details and shared the plan with Governors. I will also add links to the Facebook and Twitter page for you to read from the DfE so that you have the same information as I do. I will also contact the children in the focus year groups soon with more information and to survey your intentions regarding a return to school. We plan to continue to post a weekly learning pack on the school’s website for each class and this will continue until the end of the school year. The BBC Bitesized daily lessons are also a great resource for parents to use with their children.

In the meantime, please take some time to think on this matter. If you wish to speak to me about your personal situation then please phone or email and I will do my very best to respond as promptly as the situation allows.

Thank you for taking the time to read this somewhat lengthy letter and for your continued patience and support. We really are privileged to serve such a strong and supportive community.

Take care and stay safe

Mrs K McKechnie

Headteacher