

# Stella Maris Reopening of School Policy – June 2020

## Introduction

As part of the national response in order to limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19) schools were directed to close for the majority of pupils from the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2020. Since this date education and childcare settings have only been open to priority groups (vulnerable children and children of key workers).

During this period of closure the teachers at Stella Maris School have supported our pupils through a programme of remote education to enable our children to work from home and remain safe. The school has embraced a range of technologies in order to provide age appropriate work for our children and have been committed to daily communication and support for parents, as well as interaction with our children.

Throughout this period, the work and dedication of key workers has been crucial to our country. This of course includes not only NHS staff but other key workers who have worked tirelessly to support the country during this pandemic. In order to help this work on the front line in the fight against Covid-19 the school has welcomed the children of key workers and have provided childcare in school.

As a result of the huge efforts everyone has made to adhere to strict social distancing measures we have been told that the transmission rate of coronavirus has decreased and therefore from 8<sup>th</sup> June we are in a position to welcome back more children in a phased return to school.

We have followed government guidance and initially we will welcome back the age groups prioritised by the government, these being Pre-Prep 1 and 2, Year 1 and Year 6. In order to give all age groups some face-to-face time with their teachers we are welcoming the rest of the school back on a part-time basis, until the guidance advises that it is safe to welcome the whole school back on a full-time basis.

The government has indicated that the five key tests have been met and therefore as a result of the infection rate decreasing we are told that it is now safe to put our plans into operation. The Management of the school will continue to monitor government guidance and advice from the PHE and other governing bodies to ensure that the school remains safe for both children and staff.

Comprehensive risk assessments have been carried out by the Headteacher and other senior staff to ensure that we are safe to open and a range of safety measures have been put in place to minimise the risk of possible transmission of the virus. Information has been sent to all parents so that children can be adequately prepared for their return to school.

## **Next steps**

We want all of our children to get back into full-time education, as soon as the scientific advice allows this, because we feel that it is the best place for children to learn, and because we know how important it is for their mental wellbeing to have social interactions with their peers and teachers. Children returning to educational and childcare settings in greater numbers will also allow more parents to return to work, so we feel that our phased return to school for all children will enable our parents to plan this return to work.

This decision is based on the latest scientific advice offered to schools and we feel that by returning pupils gradually we can initially reduce the number of children in school compared to usual and put protective measures in place to reduce risks. It will also enable us to monitor the situation and make changes if they are necessary.

Children will need to stay within their class group wherever possible and we will implement a range of protective measures to ensure that we can operate in as safe a way as possible. These measures include increased cleaning, reducing 'pinch points' (such as parents dropping children at the start of the day and picking up at the end of the day), and using outdoor space where appropriate, weather permitting.

We have been informed that both staff and pupils are now eligible for testing if they become ill with coronavirus symptoms, this also applies to members of their household. More details will be provided later in this policy related to how the school will manage an outbreak or isolated case of Covid-19. It is important that all parents are aware of these procedures and follow them rigorously if this situation occurs.

## **Year groups in first phase of wider opening**

The age groups which have been prioritised by the government have been offered full-time places in our phased reopening. They have been chosen because they are viewed as key transition years – children in Pre-Prep and Year 1 are at the very beginning of their school career and are mastering the essential basics, including counting and the fundamentals of reading and writing, and learning to socialise with their peers. We know that these formative years will lay the foundation for lifelong learning and will support children's social and emotional development. Year 6 children are finishing Key Stage 2 and are preparing for the transition to secondary school, and they will benefit from time with their friends and teachers to ensure they are ready for this next important stage in their education.

Children of key workers who need to access childcare on days not allocated to their child's age group will still be welcomed as part of this phased return to school by arrangement with the school.

The government and PHE have advised schools that primary children have been prioritised firstly, because there is moderately high scientific confidence in evidence suggesting that younger children are less likely to become seriously unwell if infected with the virus; and secondly because evidence shows the particularly detrimental impact which time spent out of education can have upon them. In addition, older children are more likely to have higher

numbers of contacts outside of school so could potentially pose a greater transmission risk. It is also felt that older children are typically better able to learn at home due to being more independent.

Our approach is in line with other countries across Europe, who have begun to bring back younger children in a phased way. Approaches between countries will vary slightly, based on different public health circumstances. We continue to follow the guidance given to all schools by the government, PHE and other governing bodies. It is expected that all mainstream schools and colleges, including independent schools will follow the same approach.

Regular guidance and support will be sent to schools as we begin this reopening of schools and plans are subject to change, should an event or new scientific evidence become available, which is contrary to what we are aware of at this moment in time. Parents will be updated with any additional information by the Headteacher if the guidance changes.

### **What the latest science tells us**

Our approach to the reopening of Stella Maris School is underpinned by the latest understanding of the science which has been made known to all schools and educational settings.

This science indicates that we need to take a phased approach to reopening schools in order to limit the risk of increasing the rate of transmission (often referred to as R) above 1. The following have been factored in:

- the severity of disease in children – there is high scientific confidence that children of all ages have less severe symptoms than adults if they do contract Covid-19
- the age of children – there is moderately high scientific confidence that younger children are less likely to become unwell if infected with Covid-19
- numbers of children going back – which needs to be limited initially then increased gradually as the science permits
- systems to reduce the size of the groups coming into contact with each other.

The government have assured schools that they will continue to assess the impact of these changes closely, working with medical and scientific advisers as well as school leaders. When the most up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the Covid-19 indicates that it is appropriate to do so we will increase the number of full-time children in the school.

### **Implementation: Managing risk and rate of transmission**

Scientific advice indicates that a phased return that limits the number of children in education settings and how much they mix with each other will help to control the rate of transmission. This is set out in the general guidance which has been made available to all schools.

There are a number of immediate issues which schools have been asked to consider. The following list of issues are the ones we have identified as the priorities for Stella Maris School.

## **Key issues**

### **Risk assessment**

The Headteacher and other senior leaders have carried out a series of risk assessments before we agreed to reopening the school. Our assessments directly address risks associated with Covid-19 so that sensible measures can be put in place to control these risks for children and staff.

### **Class sizes and staff availability**

One of the protective measures we can take to reduce transmission is to have smaller group and class sizes. We understand that unlike older children and adults, early years and primary age children may find it difficult to remain 2 m apart from each other all of the time, but we have plans and policies in place to carry out this requirement as far as is practically possible.

Schools have been asked to work through a hierarchy of measures in terms of:

- frequent hand cleaning and good hygiene practices
- regular cleaning of settings
- and minimising contact and mixing.

With these measures in place across the school and different age groups we feel that all reasonable actions have been put in place to keep our children and staff safe.

It is still important to reduce contact between children and staff as far as possible, and we aim to achieve this and reduce transmission risk by ensuring children, and staff where possible, mix in a small group and keep that small group away from other people and groups within the school.

For our Pre-Prep department the staff to child ratios within Early Years Foundation Stage continue to apply, and we recommend using these to group children. Due to our small class sizes at Stella Maris School unlike other settings we are in a position to be able to allocate one teacher to each group and where possible this will be the normal teacher/teachers for that particular class.

We hope this will help our children in returning to school. We have also been able to keep all classes together as they fall below the recommended size of 15 pupils per group. This will ensure that children remain with their friends in class and when they are playing outside. However, should any teacher shortages occur then support staff may be used to lead groups, under the direction of a teacher.

Public Health England state clearly that if schools follow these principles of small groups, taught in “bubbles” and crucially if they also apply comprehensive infection control measures, such as taking steps to ensure symptomatic individuals do not attend settings, regular hand cleaning, respiratory hygiene and cleaning measures and following key advice and guidance, should a case present itself then the risk of transmission will be lowered.

The guidance suggests that where possible children should be kept 2m apart and a one-way system should be in operation for busy areas of the school. This has been implemented in the hall and access points to the doorways and toilet areas. Individual classrooms will also have their one way system arrangements, which will be explained to the children when they return. However, we have been advised that while in general groups should be kept apart some brief, transitory contact such as passing in a corridor is considered low risk.

We will review the advice on class sizes as and when the science indicates it is safe to invite more children back into school.

## **Guidance on protective measures**

The DfE guidance on [Implementing Protective Measures in Education and Childcare Settings](#) contains detailed advice for schools on:

- cleaning, including supplies of cleaning and handwashing products
- testing and tracing
- personal protective equipment (PPE)
- and what settings should do in response to a case of COVID-19 being confirmed.

## **PPE**

The current recommendation is that staff working in school do not need to wear PPE. However, we feel that staff are in a better position to make this decision, based on individual risk and preference and proximity to children. PPE is available in school for staff to wear if they wish. Parents can decide if they wish for their child to wear face coverings and if so will need to provide their child with such when they return to school.

First aiders will wear PPE when administering first aid in order to keep themselves safe and to enable them to be able to carry out their duties without risk.

## **Attendance**

No one with symptoms should attend school for any reason. Parents will not be reported to the local authority for non-attendance at this time unless there is a safeguarding issue. Schools will not be held to account for attendance levels. However, daily registration will still take place and we will continue to complete the online Educational Setting Status form which gives the Department for Education daily updates on how many children and staff are attending.

## **Vulnerable children and young people**

There is a continuing expectation that vulnerable children and young people of all year groups will attend educational or childcare provision, where it is safe and appropriate for them to do so.

Vulnerable children and young people in this context include those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including children who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child.
- have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and it is determined, following a risk assessment, carried out with educational providers and parents, that their needs can be as safely or more safely met in the educational environment
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or the local authority.

## **Curriculum**

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and our School Curriculum KS 1 and KS 2 sets out the standards we must meet for the learning, development and care of children from Pre-Prep to Year 6. Therefore, staff should use reasonable endeavours to deliver the learning and development requirements as far as possible in the current circumstances.

Schools continue to be best placed to make decisions about how to support and educate all their pupils during this period, based on the local context and staff capacity.

The professionalism and commonsense of our staff will dictate which parts of the curriculum can be taught safely and which parts cannot be taught as they pose a risk. Class teachers will assess the curriculum content as appropriate to their age groups and make these decisions in consultation with the Headteacher.

Where year groups are returning to school, teachers will:

- consider their pupils' mental health and wellbeing and identify any pupil who may need additional support so they are ready to learn
- assess where pupils are in their learning, and agree what adjustments may be needed to the school curriculum over the coming weeks using their professional expertise and experience
- identify and plan how best to support the education of the children in their care and
- support pupils in Year 6, who will need both their primary and secondary schools to work together to support their upcoming transition to Year 7.

While we anticipate that most children will return to school during this phased reopening we recognise that parents will make this decision, based on their understanding of the present situation. We will support parents in this choice and continue to provide some form

of remote learning for those children whose parents have chosen not to send them back to school.

## **Staff workload and wellbeing**

The management of the school recognise the workload of leaders and staff during this unprecedented time and are conscious of the wellbeing of all staff. They support good work-life balance for staff who are working in the reopening of our school.

## **Other Practical Measures**

There will be some other practical measures associated with the return to school and some normal processes may be changed slightly in terms of reading books going home on a daily basis etc. In order to minimise the likelihood of transmission schools have been asked to look at keeping transfer of materials between home and school to a bare minimum. Class teachers will update children on the measures relative to their age group as this advice does vary from one age group to another.

Parents are also asked to send in as little as possible in terms of materials and have been asked to send their child's lunch in a disposable bag. The cloakroom areas outside the classrooms will not be used and children will bring bags into class and hang blazers/coats (depending on weather) on backs of chairs to avoid groups sharing the same areas. These measures have been outlined for parents in the general information sheet which they have received prior to returning to school.

These measures are subject to change as the weeks progress and we evaluate how our safety/risk factors are working out in practice. We may be able to relax some of them or add extra ones if the need arises.

## **What happens if someone becomes unwell while at school?**

As in line with current guidance if anyone in school becomes unwell with a new, continuous cough or a high temperature, or has a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia), they will be sent home and advised to follow the COVID-19 guidance for households with possible coronavirus (COVID-19) infection guidance.

If a child is awaiting collection, they will be moved, if possible, to a room where they can be isolated with appropriate adult supervision, while awaiting collection by a parent or carer. Ideally, a window will be opened for ventilation. If it is not possible to isolate them, they will be moved to an area which is at least 2 metres away from other children and staff.

If they need to use the bathroom while waiting to be collected, the bathroom will be cleaned and disinfected using standard cleaning products before being used by anyone else.

PPE will be worn by staff caring for the child while they await collection if a distance of 2 metres cannot be maintained (such as for a very young child or a child with complex needs).

In an emergency the school will ring 999 if the child or member of staff is seriously ill or injured or their life is at risk. The Headteacher in consultation with first aiders will make this decision.

If a member of staff has helped someone with symptoms, they do not need to go home unless they develop symptoms themselves (and in which case, a test is available) or the child subsequently tests positive. (see 'What happens if there is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in a setting?' below) They should wash their hands thoroughly for 20 seconds after any contact with someone who is unwell. Cleaning the affected area with normal household disinfectant after someone with symptoms has left will reduce the risk of passing the infection on to other people.

### **What happens if there is a confirmed case of coronavirus (COVID-19) in school?**

When a child, young person or staff member develops symptoms compatible with coronavirus (COVID-19), they will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 7 days and arrange to have a test to see if they have COVID-19. They can do this by visiting NHS.UK to arrange or contact NHS 119 via telephone if they do not have internet access. Their fellow household members should self-isolate for 14 days. All staff and children who are attending school will have access to a test if they display symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) and are encouraged to get tested in this scenario.

Where the child or member of staff tests positive, the rest of their class or bubble will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members of that wider class or group do not need to self-isolate unless the child or staff member they live with in that group subsequently develops symptoms.

As part of the national test and trace programme, if other cases are detected within the cohort or in the wider setting, Public Health England's local health protection teams will conduct a rapid investigation and will advise schools and other settings on the most appropriate action to take. In some cases a larger number of other children and staff may be asked to self-isolate at home as a precautionary measure.

**The guidance states that where schools are observing guidance on infection prevention and control, which will reduce risk of transmission, closure of the whole setting will not generally be necessary.**

### **Should schools be asking parents to report pupils' temperatures at the start of each day or taking temperature readings on entry to school?**

The guidance states that parents, carers and schools do not need to take children's temperatures every morning. Routine testing of a child's temperature is not a reliable method for identifying coronavirus (COVID-19). Schools are advised that we should

reiterate to parents the need to follow the standard national advice on the kind of symptoms to look out for that might be due to coronavirus (COVID-19), and where to get further advice. If anyone in the household develops a fever, or a new continuous cough, or a loss of, or change in, their normal sense of taste or smell (anosmia), they are advised to follow the [COVID-19: Guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection](#) (which states that the ill person should remain in isolation for 7 days and the rest of the household in isolation for 14 days).

### **Will children be eligible for testing?**

All children eligible to attend education and childcare settings, and members of their households, will have access to testing if they display symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19). This will enable them to get back into childcare or education, and their parents or carers to get back to work, if the test proves to be negative. Parents will have a number of routes to access testing for them and their children. Visit the [guidance on coronavirus \(COVID-19\) testing and how to arrange to have a test](#).

### **Will teachers and other staff be able to get tested if they have symptoms?**

Access to priority testing is already available to all essential workers. This includes anyone involved in education, childcare or social work – including both public and voluntary sector workers, as well as foster carers. Education settings as employers can book tests through an online digital portal. There is also an option for employees to book tests directly on the portal.

In all situations the school will follow the above advice and the guidance given to educational settings. The above information is the current advice at the time of writing this policy but is subject to change as the guidance given to schools is updated or refreshed.

June 2020