

26 June 2020

Dear Parents,

As always, I hope that you are all keeping well and as sane as can be in these incredibly frustrating and trying times.

In my last update I mentioned that as soon as the Government change the 2m distancing rules within school we have detailed plans in place which would (with a lot of juggling and staff losing PPA time etc) enable the school to open to all year groups. This is still the case!

Despite the DfE sending out a circular this week that stated that Primary schools have never had to socially distance 2m apart (someone's head is rolling for that one) the documents linked to that same statement still mention 2m distancing within classrooms, alongside very ambiguous wording. In response to this I got in touch with Iain Peel (Service Director for Schools and Learning within Derbyshire County Council) whom myself and 123 other Headteachers had just had a virtual meeting with, and got the following response back:

Hi Leonie

Thank you for the email and also thank you for joining the meeting too.

I've just checked the document log and I mentioned this morning that the government had produced 211 guidance documents for schools, early years providers and children's services. I was wrong. It's now 216! Inevitably it means that there will be some contradictions in such as large number of guidance documents.

Saranjit and I meet with the DfE on a regular basis and sometimes several times per day. One issue which we have pushed the DfE hard about is the 2m social distancing issue. DfE officials have been clear that although within the guidance it is accepted that children of that age may encroach into that distance for brief periods, indeed it is likely to be impossible to stop them, eg by passing in corridors, by running up to each other in playgrounds etc. However, classroom seating or accommodation arrangements **must not design** into them a situation where children are throughout the day almost continually within 2m of each other. The rationale behind this is scientific and based on how long the virus takes to transmit – the virus is less likely to transmit if people briefly come close to each other but much more so if they are close to each other for longer periods.

Nevertheless, the government has today issued a circular titled, '24 June – Coronavirus – Daily update to all early years, children's social care, schools and further education providers'. Unfortunately this is contradictory and let me explain why.

The document appears to say exactly as you quote. Yet the guidance also provides a link to another document titled, 'Guidance Coronavirus (COVID-19): implementing protective measures in education and childcare settings. Updated 1 June 2020'. Within this document it states,

*'...For primary schools, classes should normally be split in half, with no more than 15 pupils per small group and one teacher (and, if needed, a teaching assistant). If there are any shortages of teachers, then teaching assistants can be allocated to lead a group, working under the direction of a teacher. Vulnerable children and children of critical workers in other year groups should also be split into small groups of no more than 15. Desks should be spaced as far apart as possible...', and*

*'...Where settings can keep children and young people in those small groups 2 metres away from each other, they should do so. While in general groups should be kept apart, brief, transitory contact, such as passing in a corridor, is low risk....'*

This is in line with the explanation as provided by DfE officials.

I recognise how confusing this is and the government's advice contradicts itself. Therefore, we will continue to push the DfE for consistent advice and we will reflect on whether to alter our approach once we receive some consistent guidance.

I have just rung up Health and Safety at DCC to see if the position has been changed since Wednesday to be pointed at the above email response as Iain Peel's statement on the Health and Safety website – I am famous! Needless to say, as you can read for yourselves, DCC is sticking with the 2m rule until the DfE change their documents. I am being told that the 3<sup>rd</sup> July may be a magic date for change – who knows?

All I can update you with at the moment is that as a school we are **ready to go** when the rulings change e.g. the following working day. If the rulings do not change on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, then I will get in touch with our Governing Body to see if we can do some socially distanced meet ups off school premises, perhaps down at the Pavilion.

I am desperately hoping that we all see you soon. Thank you so much for bearing with us.

Warm regards,

Leonie