



How we're planning to reintegrate more children into our primary schools

Tees Valley Education is ready. We are planning to reintegrate more children into our primary schools from next Monday (01 June 2020). Our goal, to cater for the priority children and years as identified by central government, wherever it's safe to do so.

The safety of both our children and staff as we do this is, of course, our highest priority. That's why we've developed a series of our own tests that we're holding ourselves to account for before any Tees Valley Education academy can open.

Based around the development of our own in-depth planning tool, we're working on an academy-by-academy basis to ensure that not only will we be fully compliant with government guidance but that, at a number key points we are tougher on ourselves.

We've also checked with our insurers, to make sure that, what we believe is our rigorous risk assessment and decision making process meets their standards.

Our Plans for phasing more children into the Trust

In practice, this means that of our 5 primary schools, all of them will be ready for phasing more children into the Trust next Monday.

We have communicated with all our parents across the Trust, around 35% tell us they are considering bringing their children back to us from 01 June 2020. Our task is clear; to build confidence, create trust and provide choice. It's to be there for those who are ready to return, at the same time as ensuring we never pressurise those who are not.

Our hope, of course, is that as word spreads about the robust preparations we've put into place, confidence will build and the initial trickle of returning children will steadily become a stream until eventually we are able to welcome all our children and staff back.



Our 16 Safety Tests

So, here is what we've planned. Building on the experience gained through keeping many of our schools open over the last nine weeks to serve the children of key workers and some of our most vulnerable families, we will:

1. Check that the R rate (the coronavirus reproduction rate) equals less than 1 in the local authority area where the academy is located.
2. Ensure that each Tees Valley Education academy can safely run a social distancing model, calculated on the two-metre rule, with adequate numbers of staff. So desks, for instance, will be spaced two metres apart. That means we will cap our class sizes between five and eight children, depending on the classroom size, rather than the 15 maximum of government guidance. It is important to note we have not included halls or corridors in this calculation.
3. Update all relevant Trust and academy policies and procedures and ensure staff are updated and trained on the changes prior to starting work on 01 June 2020.
4. Operate a rota system (one in three weeks on site for teaching and learning staff and one in two weeks on site for non-teaching staff) that will give all our children equal access to education at the same time as managing the numbers of children that our parents have advised they might come back to school. The government's guidance is not in favour of using a rotation system, but we believe it is the only practical way for us to make any of our buildings compatible with proper social distancing and provide us with the space to manage returning children in a safe way.
5. Add to the safety of the environment through changing the classroom layout, staggered break times, putting one-way circulation routes in place wherever possible as well as ensuring that our children spend the whole day in their small groups or 'Bubbles'.
6. Make certain that no staff or children attend if they have symptoms of coronavirus, or live in a household with anyone who has coronavirus symptoms, or with anyone who is shielding.
7. We will also further promote the test, trace and track protocol and support staff identified to self-isolate for 14 days.
8. Check that all our staff as well as our children attending any of our academies feel happy and safe to do so without pressure or obligation.
9. Guarantee that every academy has adequate supplies of soap, alcohol hand rub or sanitiser, detergent and disinfectant as well as PPE (including adequate supplies of surgical masks and disposable aprons) for adults and children who require it (staff will be trained on how to use their PPE correctly e.g. putting it on and removing it safely).
10. Ensure that if a child becomes unwell with COVID-19 symptoms, they will be isolated (preferably outdoors, which is in line with PHE guidance, to remain in open spaces). The supervising adult will wear appropriate PPE until the child is collected to return home.
11. Advise staff who are pregnant or who are over 70 not to attend – even though government guidance currently states that pregnant staff can be on site.



12. Operate staggered drop-off and collection times for children, with only one parent attending, at the school gates to minimise adult contact within the school.
13. Ensure that hands are washed thoroughly for 20 seconds with running water and soap (or alcohol hand rub or sanitiser if soap is not available) and then dried to an agreed schedule, including on arrival, before and after eating, after coughing or sneezing and after using the toilet.
14. Promote the 'Catch it. Bin it. Kill it' approach to good respiratory hygiene.
15. Ensure deep clean, defend clean and onsite cleaner to clean regularly all frequently touched surfaces using detergents and disinfectant. Further half termly deep cleans will be in place.
16. Ensure independent quality assurance on Trust risk assessments and on site audits during the first two weeks of phasing more children into the academies

In addition to this, the risk assessments are live documents and will be reviewed continually. The Trust Board have established a COVID-19 task and finish group to monitor the risk assessments and any changes that have been made.

Trustees following the efforts made across the Trust, to meet the 16 safety tests, plus external assurance on the risk assessments from our Health and Safety Consultant, with confirmation from our insurer and from Government announcing on Thursday 28 May 2020, that their 5 tests have been met – Trustees have agreed for all the academies to reintegrate more children from 01 June 2020.

Beyond all this, we recognise that, as important as each of these practical measures is, the real key to successfully phasing more children into the academies reopening– lies elsewhere.

In the end, it is the quality of the relationships between a school's staff and its leaders, and between parents and the school; a relationship that is built on clear communication and trust, which is the game changer. Only trust will enable staff and families to feel confident in schools taking the first 'baby steps' in the staged return to our academies eventually being fully open.

Only the presence and nurturing of trust will enable staff, parents and children to voice their legitimate fears. Only trust will create the open culture which allows them to be honest about how they are feeling. Only trust will generate an atmosphere in which the regular review of progress can take place and any problems aired and solved together.

Getting the country's schools safety open as soon as possible is the shared goal of all in education. Not do so is to disregard our responsibility and to leave many of our children and their families without the support they need. But not to do so safely would equally neglect our duty of care.



For those children who are not able to start for whatever reason, the academies are continuing to provide educational resource packs to these children, including online and practical resources such as pens/paper/books and art materials.

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