

11.6.20

Dear Parents,

Thank you all for your continued support over the last week as we have begun to re-open our DoWMAT academies to more children. To enable this to happen safely, the Headteachers and Local Academy Boards for each academy were asked to look at their available space and work out how many additional Year groups they could accommodate, prioritising Years Nursery, Reception, 1 and 6, in line with the Government's wishes.

The resulting plans have differed from academy to academy as all are having to work around a different set of challenges; most commonly small classrooms, the increasing number of key worker children or the number of staff still shielding. The DoWMAT Board fully supports and has ratified all the plans submitted by each academy for their re-opening and has appreciated the care and attention Headteachers and Local Academy Boards have taken in ensuring the safety of their parents, children and staff remains a top priority.

We have found that many of our classrooms can only accommodate 10 children at most when taking into account the "2m rule"; instead of the 30 children we might have in them under normal circumstances. Unfortunately, this has meant that we do have some academies who have only been able to welcome in one Year group, over and above their key worker and vulnerable children. We are deeply sorry if this has caused any inconvenience to families expecting their children to return, following the Government announcement.

We have now heard that the Government is urging schools and academies to be flexible and, where they have the capacity, to bring back further children before the summer holiday. All our Headteachers are exceptionally keen to get as many children back into school as possible even if it is only for a few days and I know they are now all thinking creatively as to how this might be achieved. However, it is a sad reality that, for those of our academies already at full capacity, it will not be possible to increase the number of children any further under the current Government guidelines.

I know this will cause extreme frustration for many of our parents anxious for their child to quickly resume their learning in school and we regret that we are in this unavoidable position. We also want to see our children return to school, as soon as it is appropriate for them to do so. Please know that, if it does become possible for your academy to welcome back further children, you will be informed as soon as possible of the arrangements and which additional year group/s this will apply to.

All our teachers appreciate that the best environment for children to learn is in school with their peer group. Unfortunately, the unprecedented nature of the Covid-19 pandemic has meant that nationally we have seen the majority of children remain at home, unable to access a traditional school setting. To mitigate the impact of this, the teachers at each DoWMAT academy have been preparing high quality learning for their children to access at home. Please be assured that your DoWMAT academy will continue to support your children in this way until we are able to welcome them back into school.

We have received several queries on a range of matters regarding the re-openings of schools. Here are a few of those most frequently arising, that you may be wondering about yourselves;

**My school is unable to offer my child a place in Year 1 / Year 6. Can they be accommodated in another DoWMAT or Local Authority School?**

No. All schools, including our DoWMAT academies, are looking for ways they can bring the maximum number of their own children back for at least some time before the summer holiday starts. Each school is facing the same constraints and is unlikely to have additional space to accommodate children from a different school.

**My child is due to move to Middle School / High School in September. What will happen now with regards to transition arrangements?**

Both the Middle and High Schools are very aware of the difficulties in organising transition activities in the remainder of the summer term. As a result, Headteachers in the receiving schools are already considering plans for additional support when welcoming new intakes as they arrive in September. Please assure your Year 4,5,6 or 7 child that they will be well looked after when they arrive at their new school.

**Will we still be able to hold end of year parties / celebrations?**

As a result of the pandemic, the end of the summer term is going to feel very different to how it has in previous years. Sadly, the regulations we are operating under now will mean that the usual festivities including end of year parties and celebrations are unlikely to go ahead. This will be very disappointing, especially for those in the final year at their school. However, I know our Headteachers will be thinking of ways for their children to say goodbye to friends at the end of the school year in a safe and appropriate manner, if at all possible.

**Will my child's school be open over the summer holidays?**

At the moment, the Government has not shared any plans as to whether schools will be required to remain open over the summer for the children of key workers or if they will be required to provide catch up lessons to recover some of the learning lost over the lockdown. We await further guidance from the Department of Education on this. However, we are not currently envisioning keeping our DoWMAT academies open over the summer. Our teachers will need time to refresh and plan for the next academic year. In addition, many of our academies are planning building works to

ensure the academy remains in a good state of repair. With the schools open over Easter and half term, many have a back log of jobs to do that will be difficult to get done with children in the building.

**Will our school be open for all children in September?**

We are very much hoping that all our academies will be open to their full cohort of children in September. However, we will need to wait on Government guidance before we can confirm this will definitely be the case.

I hope this letter goes some way in explaining our current position. I know many of you have voiced your appreciation of the way in which your academy has supported you and your children through this difficult time. This has meant a lot to all our Headteachers who have been placed in an unenviable position, trying to balance government directives and follow the current regulations with depleted members of staff, complex hygiene arrangements and social distancing.

I know your Headteacher will be in contact regarding any further arrangements to be made in the remainder of the year.

Kind Regards,



Claire Davies

DoWMAT CEO



Hugh Richards

DoWMAT Chair