

Tuesday 16th June 2020

Dear Parents/Carers of Ecclesall Primary School children,

In the time I have been Chair of Governors, the school has faced many challenges, through changes in leadership to the recent expansion and building works to create the school we now have. Each time I thought it could not get any worse, how wrong was I...

This year has been difficult for everyone, the challenges of COVID-19 and lockdown; the total change to the way we live has taken some getting used to, especially for those who have been directly affected by the virus in any way.

Schools are an important part of our children's development, learning to get along with each other, developing friendships and learning to cope with the challenges life brings and so it was difficult for the staff to see the school closed for many whilst we looked to prevent the spread of the virus.

The school did remain open throughout (including the Easter holidays) for the children of key workers and vulnerable families whilst also moving, as we have all had to do, to home schooling, an online way of life and juggling work. This has been particularly challenging for primary schools and it has been a delight to see the creativity of our pupils and even staff over the last few months. We acknowledge that this has not been, by any stretch of the imagination, the type of education our children deserve and we appreciate the hard work the staff have done in supporting home learning whilst considering the difficulties this has brought for many in trying to also juggle working from home and life in general.

Every school in Sheffield is different in terms of the make-up of their local community, the funding received and the number of key workers. The school has had to consider how it is best able to respond to the challenge of COVID-19, considering the risks, staffing, the welfare of all our pupils and the time available. This has been no mean feat and required the school to make difficult decisions but in doing so, I can assure you the best interests of the pupils are at the heart of every decision.

We would have loved to hold live classes using Zoom/ Google but we have been and continue to be advised not to do this for safeguarding reasons. We would have loved to be in contact with our families more but resources are limited and we have had to prioritise what we can and cannot do, including ensuring that we will continue to support home learning as best we can. This is not how we would wish to do things but what the situation has necessitated and for this, we can only apologise. The new primary school has made it easier for the school to cope with and address the challenges COVID-19 has brought, having a single site with great facilities and grounds to work with has helped but unfortunately has not been the solution to all the problems faced.

The government announced that it wanted to see Foundation Stage (FS), Y1 and Y6 pupils return to school on the 1st of June, alongside vulnerable and key worker pupils. There is nothing the school wanted more than to be able to achieve this; FS is key for pupils, settling them into the start of schooling and hopefully developing a love for learning whilst Y6 is an important year in seeing our pupils move to the next stage of the journey before moving to secondary school. The amount of work that has been undertaken by the Senior Leadership Team in considering options; scenario planning has been immense with information for the Local Authority and Government changing daily, and in some cases more frequently, requiring plans to be revisited.

You will all appreciate the delights of maths problems our children face whilst at school and so was amused that schools, designed to have little slack in the system in terms of staffing and space, were asked to effectively double the number of classrooms and staff required to facilitate social distancing and a safe return. It took the Government weeks to realise it is not practical; I am sure our pupils would have been quicker!

I can assure you that every option possible has been considered in looking to increase the number of pupils we are able to bring back to school whilst ensuring the safety of children and staff. In order to maintain provision for our key worker and vulnerable children's families, it has meant that the school has limited capacity to open even further.

The SLT will work tirelessly over the summer vacation to plan (and re-plan) for the full reopening of the school. This will no doubt not be the 'normal' schooling we would wish for but I do know our teachers will ensure that the children will have a fantastic time, making the most of the world we may find ourselves in.

Life does go on though, we are still waiting for OFSTED, we continue to see the arrival and departure of staff and pupils and we wish them all well. The school is in excellent shape and has plans to improve the site further, with the invaluable support of the EPTFA, and therefore develop and grow as a primary school.

I would like to thank you for your continued support, especially through this difficult time; the staff appreciate your messages of thanks.

My thanks to the staff for their hard work throughout the year and especially to the Senior Leadership Team in steering the school during this difficult year.

I hope you all have a safe and restful summer break.

Kevin Corke
Chair of Governors
For and on behalf of the Governing Body