

5 May 2020

To all members of the PAT community of schools

I want to take the opportunity to thank you again for all that you have been doing to support and sustain learning for our students during these challenging times. I am very proud that as a Trust we have been able rapidly to adapt to the very different demands of lockdown. Learning has continued and vulnerable families have been supported through each of individual schools.

The government has promised to make announcements this week on changes to lockdown and we expect that a partial or phased opening of schools will be part of these announcements. The safety and health of students and staff will be paramount for us. The Executive Leadership Team have been meeting weekly to consider the issues involved and we will share more details once we know more from the government about their expectations. However, I thought it would be helpful to provide some outline principles below.

I do understand that the move to re-opening schools will raise many questions and cause some anxiety. I want to assure you that there will be regular communication and we will keep arrangements under regular review. We will arrange for school-based staff planning time before any re-opening commences so that everyone is clear about procedures and expectations particularly in relation to personal protection, hygiene and cleaning. With target dates known, this will of course be far easier.

Our aim is to maintain individual local school provision underpinned by our strong partnership across the Trust. We are aware that the needs and challenges of each school will be different and may change over time. The headteachers will continue to work together with the central team to ensure each school is supported through the transition.

Once we know more about government expectations, I will be in touch again with more detailed information about our planned response.

Strategic planning for reopening schools – planning, strategy and aspirations:

In the next 6 months we want:

- A safe and well-managed return to schools; wellbeing and welfare will be uppermost
- A smooth transition from home learning to school-based learning, with quick identification of those students who might have fallen behind, and commensurate interventions.

It is also crucially important that -

- The idea that learning is enjoyable is not lost as we help children make successful re-entry
- All staff and schools take full stock of what has happened, and don't necessarily fall into old patterns unthinkingly; things have changed. Opportunities should be taken. The 'old normal' will not be immediately possible
- Curriculum remains of overriding importance for all schools in 2020, and is of course the subject of close Ofsted focus – we need to plan accordingly
- The whole PAT community and its relationships grow stronger through the emergency, feeling pride and strength in our family of schools

The following core principles and tasks will help us achieve this:

- Preparedness: practical preparations in terms 5 and 6 will focus on ensuring full supplies of relevant sanitisation, cleaning and hand-washing products; amending schedules to ensure deeper and more continuous cleaning

- Communication at all times with parents to make sure you are fully abreast of Trust developments, preparation and thinking; expectations of parents will be made clear
- Similarly, we will be clear, regular and consistent in our communications with all staff
- INSET time will be taken in the preceding week before opening to ensure that no further time is lost to children and the community. Two days minimum depending upon schools' circumstances
- Staff identified through the NHS as being especially vulnerable to infection will be well supported in working from home
- We will at all times follow DFE and Government advice in reopening; it is likely that, as the Government took the decision to close, it will also be directive in determining how schools reopen. However, we are also aware of the need to limit social exposure throughout the school community
- Particular care will be spent in supporting students whose families have suffered bereavements, and this will require additional resources and time
- All staff, parents and children will welcome the degree of normality that comes with reopening; routines will be quickly put in place, adapting to the challenges faced
- We will address with children what has happened and our continuing efforts to make sure safety is paramount
- Opportunities for understanding what has occurred will be offered through creative and expressive arts, with the potential for more clarity in thinking and even therapeutic value

I will be in touch as soon as we have had opportunity to assimilate new information from Government determining the basis on which schools are to reopen, and will create an additional channel whereby staff and parents are able to communicate thoughts and questions to the 'nerve centre' of PAT: the central team and Trust Board. We will base our planning on the successful experience seen elsewhere in Europe towards safe reopening of schools.

Take care, and thanks for your patience, resilience, support and commitment to learning.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Withers

**Chief Executive Officer
Palladian Academy Trust**