

20 May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

All PAT schools are engaged in making preparations at the present time for a phased return during the final term of the year, from 1 June onwards. You will have seen which year groups have been prioritised by Government, and also some of the advice and suggestions as to how this should be accomplished. Our purpose in writing to you today, with only a few days of term 5 remaining, is to support your decision making, set out how school will be different, and hopefully offer some reassurance.

The bedrock of a school is positive relationships which bring humour, light, learning and a sense of community. This will never change for us, and has not changed during the preceding weeks in which children have mostly been learning at home. We do think it is important to say this because an atmosphere of extreme fearfulness, apartness and risk aversion holds its own dangers for our young people who often now struggle with mental health issues. Our schools will be as warm and welcoming as they can be, within the safety regime that must also apply.

Below you will find guidance on dropping off children, picking them up, distancing regimes, food, breaks, our use of 'bubbles' or 'pods' (self-contained groups of children and adults) and other matters related to our safe opening. All of this will serve to minimise risks, but will not erase them altogether. Bubbles will be maintained, although some changes will ultimately be needed in the dynamic and shifting picture, not least with the Government's ambition for all children to be back in school for the last month of the academic year.

We appreciate that children have been growing in the time they have been off site, and that some uniform has been hard to replace, including shoes, with outlets closed. Accordingly, all PAT schools will be very understanding in asserting uniform code, and a normal routine at home will be to wash clothes on return when possible; we know the virus can live on textiles. So: yes to uniform, but a louder yes to safety.

Parents will understand the limits to distancing in a school context; advice from the DFE is explicit that this is not possible, especially with younger children. Learners will be operating in much smaller groups, spaced out, and not sharing desks in the way that they are used to. The wearing of face coverings is not recommended by the Government in schools, and PPE will be worn only when there is need for staff to be offering more intimate care, or working at closer quarters.

School cleaning rotas will of course be considerably more thorough and continuous than in more normal times. Hand-washing routines, now second-nature to most of us, will be asserted positively. Schools are undertaking detailed risk assessments in the time remaining to plan ahead, and also working together to share this in the Trust.

We also remind you of the importance of following the government advice to not send your child to school if they or someone in the house has a high temperature, new persistent cough or a loss or change to their sense of smell or taste. Our staff will follow this advice also. If anyone becomes ill with these symptoms during the school day, we will contact you to collect your child as soon as possible and we continue to follow the government protocols to respond and manage transmission risk.

How can we further advise you with the decision you are making about return? Some parents have decided that it is overwhelmingly for the best, in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to make a swift return. Other parents are adamant that this moment has not yet arrived. Many are betwixt and between these poles. Many staff also face these dilemmas, or know family members and friends who certainly do. You will know that, given the situation, the DFE and our schools will not be pursuing attendance in the way which otherwise would have happened, at least in the short term. You will be making your own decisions, and we will help with this wherever we can.

What is fair to say, though, is that teachers will be dividing their attentions between the on-site group of learners, and those who elect to continue to work at home. PAT is offering a blended curriculum, that is to say: the learning materials in school will match those sent home to support progress. Realistically, the level of attention to home learners will be the best that can be achieved within such a context, with marking and assessment demands also rising proportionately. Levels of staffing available will be far from optimal. Be reassured that every effort will be expended to support all children's learning how best we can.

PAT schools have also decided that in the current context, not least the difficulties of normal operation, any INSET days will not be held in this academic year.

All of the above is offered in good faith and heart on 20 May. The picture develops, with union leaders continue to seek further assurances, and those meetings are ongoing, with a key one on Thursday 28 May. We can only watch this space as to how that will transpire. What is certainly true is that PAT schools will not be expanding their welcome unless safety considerations are met, and a time arrives when benefits are outweighing risks. It should never be forgotten that a very lengthy spell at home carries risks too for young people.

Yours sincerely,



Tim Withers

Chief Executive Officer
Palladian Academy Trust