

Covid-19 and Boldmere Schools – frequently asked questions

Dear parents/guardians

We have received a number of questions from parents/carers over the last few weeks with regards to Covid-19, the provision in place at Boldmere Schools and what happens next.

Working with the Board of Governors, we have created this ‘frequently asked questions’ document. While there remains much to understand about how and when school life will return to complete normality, we hope this addresses your questions. We have been as thorough and transparent as we can in order to also give you an insight into the rationale behind the decisions made since lockdown, and some guidance on what you should expect as this term comes to an end and we prepare for the start of the new school year in September.

This document covers:

1. Current provision in school
2. Home-schooling
3. End of term and summer break
4. Autumn term/September 2020
5. Busy Bodies
6. Safety and wellbeing
7. Contacting school

The information in this FAQ is accurate at the time of writing. Guidance, and therefore the school’s decision making, is subject to change. Updates to this document will be provided as and when useful.

Yours sincerely,

C Glasgow
Executive Head Teacher

G Bloom
Chair of Governors

Question	Answer
Current provision in school	
How many pupils have returned to school?	<p>All Nursery, Reception and Year 6 places originally requested have been appropriately planned for and allocated. We have utilised our staffing and classroom capacity effectively to meet the number of places that were originally requested.</p> <p>Additional requests for places received after the deadline led to the creation of a 'waiting list' and should the capacity to offer provision improve, we will aim to meet additional needs as and where possible. We have had to cap the number of allocated keyworker places available in each school as we simply do not have any further capacity at present.</p>
Why did the school decide to not to allow Year 1 children to return when the Government cited Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 as the priority year groups?	<p>All of our decisions are guided by a combination of government policy, local authority and professional education body advice available at the time, and our own risk, staffing and viability assessments.</p> <p>As a federated infant and junior school, we faced different choices to combined primary schools.</p> <p>The physical footprint and layout of our school buildings and how we accommodate social distancing requirements has had a significant bearing on the decisions we have made. Staff capacity is also an influencing factor, along with the number of classroom 'environments' that would be required. Our classrooms are smaller than the average and when marked out at in accordance with 2 metre social distancing requirements, can take a maximum of 12 pupils per classroom. Therefore, one normal class of 30 pupils now uses three classrooms instead of one, each requiring teaching and support staff.</p> <p>We also had to carefully consider day-to-day operational requirements such as toileting, hand washing hygiene requirements, staggered start times, staggered lunchtimes, etc. These general also limit the number of children that we can have in school and have taken a great deal of planning to effectively put them in place.</p> <p>Our conclusion was that we could not bring back both Reception and Year 1 children and implement the necessary social distancing measures and adequate staff cover. As Nursery children are contained within a separate area of the school that could be accommodated. Year 6 children are located separately within the junior school.</p>

<p>Why are keyworker and vulnerable children being given priority?</p>	<p>This decision is guided by government policy. It is also the right thing to do. The list of jobs identified by the government as 'keyworkers' has not changed since it was first issued. 'Vulnerable' children are those who are looked after, have an allocated social worker or have an Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP) in place. However, if it was deemed that these children were safer in their own homes, they did not and do not need to access school provision.</p> <p>While we understand some parents/carers feel their individual requirements mean we should be able to accept their child/children, we are unable to do this as long as social distancing measures remain in place.</p>
<p>Why did the school decide to only accommodate children from families where both parents are key workers?</p>	<p>The government guidance at the time gave individual schools the authority to determine their own keyworker children policy. At the point of making this decision, Covid-19 was escalating rapidly and the national priority was to stay at home, stay safe and protect the NHS. We reflected on all the advice available at the time, consulted with our Board of Governors and concluded it was in the best interests of our staff and wider school community to keep the number of children coming into school at an absolute minimum. We believe this was the right decision at the time and remains the right decision for Boldmere Schools.</p>
<p>What alternative return to school options were considered? For example, has a shorter week for Reception and Year 6 been considered in order to allow other year groups back in for days, or alternating years on a weekly basis?</p>	<p>The return to school guidance identified the target year groups that have returned to school provision along with the continued provision for keyworker and vulnerable children. The guidance clearly stated that these target year groups of Nursery, Reception, Year 1 (if a Primary School) and Year 6 were the priority and fulltime schooling for these groups was what the guidance stipulated. We evaluated both full time and part time scenarios and concluded that full time was in the best interests of those pupils returning and our staff.</p> <p>The return of pupils in each school is very different to another and it will be dictated by the capacity of each school and how they have decided to interpret the guidance. There certainly is not a 'one size, fits all' approach to this and we feel we have made the right decisions for our school at this time. It is not simply a decision of how many classroom and staff we have available; the logistics, organisation and procedures put in place to allow for the safe return of identified pupils along with ensuring the safety and well-being of all staff has been a massive undertaking and certainly one that should not be under-estimated.</p>
<p>Will other year groups return to school this term? If not, why?</p>	<p>We are unfortunately unable to return additional year groups to school this term. There are a number of reasons for this, the most pertinent being our physical infrastructure and ability to maintain the required social distancing measures, the staffing resource required to plan, prepare and teach a full year group being available. We have explored finishing the Reception and Year 6 term early to enable two other year groups to return, but concluded this is not a practical option at this time.</p>

<p>If school has some additional capacity, can it be used to accommodate children of parents/carers who do not qualify as keyworkers but who need to return to work or for personal reasons?</p>	<p>While we understand the pressure some parents/carers are currently experiencing, the school unfortunately cannot accommodate children unless they are confirmed as vulnerable, both parents are keyworkers, or they are in Nursery, Reception or Year 6. It is sadly impossible for us to judge individual cases on a fair and consistent basis.</p> <p>Any increased capacity will lead to the school contacting previously identified individuals who fall in to this category to offer provision.</p>
<p>Has the BIB reopened?</p>	<p>Yes. All children normally attending the BIB were offered a place from mid-June and we have been able to accommodate almost all those requesting one. Some children accessing the BIB are provided with travel arrangements from Birmingham City Council which are currently unavailable. So, a handful of pupils who have this provision in place are not able to attend at present.</p>
<p>Why is school now closing early on Fridays?</p>	<p>Within the school week, we need to allow time for teacher PPA time (which is requirement for all teaching staff) and for a deep clean of all classrooms, including toys in Nursery and Reception classes. The shorter teaching day on Friday allows these activities to take place.</p> <p>We have made provisions to keep school open for key worker classes on Friday afternoons.</p>
<p>Why is the school deviating from Government guidance on occasions?</p>	<p>We have not deviated from Government directives. Any guidance issued has not been statutory or mandatory and each school has been left to interpret it in the way that it allows them to be operational, whilst maintain the safety of all in and around school. All Government guidance has been evaluated together with advice from the local authority and our professional bodies. We have also considered staff and pupil impact and wellbeing and our policy and strategic plan amongst numerous other factors. It should also be noted that Government guidance has, at times, been absent, incomplete and subject to change, making it very difficult to follow the time constraints imposed. The Senior Leadership Team have made decisions in the best interests of the children and staff and these have been made in conjunction with the full governing board.</p> <p>For reference, the latest government advice for parents and carers is here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-Years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-Years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak</p>

<p>Why has Boldmere School made decisions that differ from other local schools?</p>	<p>Every school must make decisions based on their own unique set of circumstances at that moment in time. While we have collaborated with other Sutton schools throughout this crisis, we do not necessarily have the same operating model, nor have we necessarily reached the same conclusions. This applies to all schools, not just Boldmere School.</p>
<p>Is the school collaborating with other local schools regarding provision, best practice, decision making, etc?</p>	<p>Yes. We are in a long-term collaborative partnership with all Sutton primary schools, and a part of the consortium of Sutton schools. We regularly meet (virtually), are in touch daily and absolutely collaborate where we believe that is the right thing to do. We nevertheless remain autonomous schools in full control of our own decision making.</p> <p>It is important to understand that the school provision being offered by one Sutton school is completely different to another. This is down to the individuality of each school and elements including staffing levels and classroom capacity.</p>
<p>Will the change in social distancing guidelines from 2m to 1m enable additional years to return?</p>	<p>We have reviewed the impact a change from 2m to 1m will have and while it does bring some benefits in terms of the interactivity pupils within a bubble can enjoy, and would ease some movements around school, we do not think it materially changes the number of pupils we can have in school.</p> <p>A reduction to 1 metre would only increase our capacity by an additional 3-5 more pupils to the existing bubble classes. This would unfortunately not be sufficient to allow us to create additional year group bubbles as it would not make a material difference to our staff or space capacity.</p> <p>However, as and when a decision on social distancing or a change to any guidance / policy is made by government, that guidance / policy will be reviewed alongside our current risk assessments by both the Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Board.</p>
<p>What alternatives has the school looked at to extend capacity?</p>	<p>We have evaluated numerous options including cross-school collaborations, alternative use of school spaces, and temporary buildings on site. In all scenarios we have concluded they are not viable options for reasons of cost, pupil wellbeing, staff wellbeing and logistical/practical issues.</p> <p>It is important to note that no additional government or Local Authority funding has currently been made available to schools to explore any alternatives than those currently available on our school site.</p>
<p>I have a suggestion about extending capacity – who should I talk to?</p>	<p>A number of parent/carers have contacted us in recent weeks with suggestions as to how school may extend its provision. These have included utilising other local buildings, recruiting retired teachers, and using modular classrooms or marquees on the playing field. While we appreciate the majority of these requests come from a well-meaning place, they are not realistic. Any additional provision has to be appropriately risk assessed and evaluated to fully understand the resources required to implement. This takes a lot of time and we do not currently have that capacity.</p>

<p>Can you recruit additional staff to extend capacity?</p>	<p>Recruitment has not been an option open to us in the time frame we've been working to for two key reasons: firstly, we do not have additional headcount in our budget and there are not additional funds available for this purpose (it's worth noting the school has been losing money during lockdown due to lost revenues from a number of income streams, including Busy Bodies); and secondly the recruitment process takes time due to the interview process, DBS checks and references required. These are vital steps we must take to ensure that we are following safer recruitment guidelines at all times, and in turn effectively safeguarding all Boldmere School children.</p> <p>We will review staffing requirements for the new academic year as and when we understand any changes to our provision that may be required due to government policy / guidance.</p>
<p>What additional government funding has the school received?</p>	<p>No additional funding has been made available to the school so far. We are currently awaiting confirmation of a scheme that may allow us to recoup any Covid-19 related expenses over and above the usual running costs. At the time of writing, this information has not yet been released so the school must continue to operate within its existing budget.</p>
<p>Have staff been remunerated or accrued leave for time worked over Easter break/half terms?</p>	<p>Staff have not been remunerated for out of hours work or for time worked over the Easter and half term breaks. We have established a rota that allows the majority of this time to be taken in lieu on a day by day basis. We would like to thank all staff members for their continued commitment to the school and our children throughout this situation; all are facing the same challenges and disruption to their personal and family lives as the rest of us so this commitment has not come without personal consequence.</p>
<p>Have any staff been furloughed?</p>	<p>No. As all staff costs are covered directly by the Designated School Grant (DSG) and none of our staff costs are privately funded, there is no opportunity for the school to furlough staff. All staff available have been utilised effectively to maintain the operational capacity of the school in the best way possible.</p>
<p>Are all staff now back in school?</p>	<p>All staff who are able are now back in school. There are a small number working from home, as dictated by their risk assessment. They continue to play a full and active role but as they are not in school they are unable to help us extend our operational capacity.</p> <p>There are also a number of staff members in school who while not shielding are at an increased risk of infection. We have therefore reduced or removed their pupil contact as a precaution.</p> <p>Rest assured, all staff are being fully utilise.</p>

<p>What are the teachers normally teaching Years 1-5 doing currently?</p>	<p>In the infant school, all teaching staff are currently involved in delivering the in-school provision and home learning resources/pupil contact activities. The social distancing measures in place mean we have had to adapt our usual staffing provision to facilitate. For example we have a 'runner' dedicated for each bubble group (because teaching staff cannot leave their bubble) to manage all the normally simple tasks that happen during the teaching day (for example toilet visits). In addition to the returning classes, we have teachers dedicated to the key worker class, a fourth Reception class and to home learning preparation.</p> <p>Within the junior school, we have two keyworker classes and six bubble classes for our Year 6 children. Each class has two members of staff allocated to ensure all health and safety requirements are being adhered to effectively. As with the infants, we have staff dedicated to home learning resource preparation.</p>
<p>Is Mrs Silverwood back in school?</p>	<p>Mrs Silverwood remains on sick leave and will not be back in school this term.</p>
<p>Is there any intention to extend the home-schooling provision this term?</p>	<p>We have recently trialled Google Classroom as a way of bringing together class groups with their teacher online and this is being rolled out to all year groups (except those back in school) from w/c 22/06. We will continue to add new learning resources to the website weekly and to provide readings from teachers each week.</p> <p>It is important to note that the DfE have not stipulated any specific requirements in relation to what constitutes effective 'home learning'. Each school has been left with the challenging task of putting this in place whilst ensuring the school remains operational every day. We would like to reassure parents that we have done – and are continuing to do – our utmost to provide the best that we can.</p>
<p>Will Google Classroom be extended beyond the fortnightly provision currently planned?</p>	<p>We are rolling out Google Classroom out across Years 3, 4 and 5 following a trial. For these year groups, there will be a fortnightly, 40-minute call between your child's teacher and a group of 15 children from each class. Unfortunately, we cannot extend the use of Google Classroom further this term as teachers are working across different aspects of our school provision and we do not currently have the usual amount of flexibility we can exercise.</p> <p>We do not believe Google Classroom is suitable for children in the infants school and will continue with the telephone contact activity already in place.</p>

<p>Why has Google Classroom only now been introduced?</p>	<p>We began to explore use of Google Classroom as teaching resource became available to do so. With returning pupils settled, we have been able to redirect staff to focus on this. Staff working from home have been unable to take on this work for both practical and policy reasons.</p> <p>The setting up of Google Classrooms has not been easy and a number of steps have been required before we've been able to trial, including appropriate risk assessments and ensuring we operate within DfE guidelines and within our own policies. This is new ground for all of us; this is a new initiative for most schools and like with anything new it takes time to plan and prepare. Parents/carers may not be aware that the teaching unions are opposed to tools like Google Classroom and it was right we also understood their concerns and assured ourselves it would be appropriate for our school.</p> <p>It is important to note that there is no requirement from the DfE or government for schools to establish video contact and therefore official guidance has not been provided.</p>
<p>Are children not back in school still receiving a call home from their teacher?</p>	<p>Yes. all infant children still at home are being called by their teacher on a fortnightly cycle. Teachers will try twice to make contact. All contact is logged for our own and your children's records and is reviewed by the Senior Leadership Team.</p> <p>In the junior school, the call home has now been replaced with a fortnightly Google Classroom session. See above for more information.</p> <p>We have an additional contact plan in place for vulnerable children.</p>
<p>Can school do more to help parents?</p>	<p>We believe school is doing its utmost to ensure that we are doing as much as possible to support our school community. As staffing capacity has increased, so has the support to parents in a variety of different forms.</p>
<p>I would like more work for my child, can you provide?</p>	<p>Teachers are providing new learning resources weekly via the school website as well as lots of links for extra activities and learning. With regret, we do not currently have the resource to extend this provision. It is important to remember that home learning is a temporary situation. We appreciate this is an incredible challenge for most families but schools are simply not able to provide a 'normal' school provision for children at home. There is an enormous volume of learning resources available online and we would encourage parents/carers looking for additional learning content to access these.</p>

I/my child cannot keep up with the volume of work being posted on the school website.	We stress that the resources we are providing on the website are suggested activities and not an exhaustive list that you must work through. Home-learning is not an expectation and it is important children's wellbeing is prioritised. As the lockdown rolls on, it is increasingly challenging for everyone. There are no rules during this unprecedented time except to say that our wellbeing should dictate our daily expectations as far as home learning is concerned. If your child is having a 'good' day then try home schooling, but if this is not the case, then please do not put unnecessary pressure on yourself or your child!
End of term & summer break	
Will this term end on the planned date?	At the time of writing, the final day of term will be Friday 17 th July. This was ratified by the Governors in their Extraordinary Meeting held on Thursday 18 th June.
Will school be open over the usual summer break?	No. The decision has been taken to close for the summer holidays as per usual to all pupils. This decision has been made in conjunction with the Governors. Other Sutton schools have made the same decision.
Will there be catch up lessons during the summer break?	The school will not be running any catch-up lessons either in school or otherwise during the summer break. External suppliers may establish a provision should the guidelines permit it. If we become aware of any such provision, we will make you aware via the newsletter. Please note that we cannot vouch for the suitability of any external provision for your child. The school facilities will not be made available to any external providers this summer.
What support is available to key worker parents over the summer break?	School will not be in a position to support any parents/carers with wraparound care during the summer break. The Government is expected to announce details of 'summer camps' imminently. As soon as we are made aware of any external provision, we will of course effectively signpost our school community through our normal lines of communication.
Will there be any opportunity for the children to see their classmates before the end of term?	Unfortunately, the current social distancing guidance means we cannot allow gatherings of any nature on school premises. We know many parents are in contact with one another and hope informal reunions can be arranged over the summer if and when the guidance is relaxed. Sadly, the school will not be able to facilitate this.
Will there be a Year 6 leavers celebration?	At the time of writing, this is still being carefully considered as we are definitely limited as to what we can offer. If we are unable to provide the children in Year 6 with their 'normal' send off, we will look to invite them back to school at a later date.
How do we collect any personal property left in school?	Our ambition is to arrange for parents/carers to collect their child's end of year reports, on a rota basis, from school from Monday 6 th July. Any items that need collecting from school will be available then. We will communicate further details about this shortly.

<p>Will there be any teacher assessment or end of year reports?</p>	<p>Yes. End of year reports will be sent out to all parents/carers on 6th July. The reports being received will be a little different to those being received in previous years due to numerous assessments not being completed this academic year, and some data being insufficient or void. We are reporting in line with DfE guidance and a letter of explanation will also accompany your child's report.</p>
<p>Autumn term / September 2020</p>	
<p>Will school reopen as normal in September?</p>	<p>At the time of writing, it is our belief and sincere hope that school will reopen to all pupils on 3rd September. However, we will continue to monitor Government policy and guidance and should plans need to evolve, we will communicate those changes in the usual way as quickly as we are able.</p> <p>The priority for any return to school must be that it is safe to do so. Therefore, if extra time is required early in the autumn to prepare the school environment sufficiently, the start of term may be delayed until week commencing the 7th September for all pupils. This decision cannot be made until we are in full receipt of the guidance from the government, and the changing nature of this pandemic means that this decision may not be made until much nearer the time.</p>
<p>What plans are there to help transition pupils into their new year groups?</p>	<p>Transition planning is well underway and activities are in line with our usual transition timetable. We are currently creating new transition packs for pupils and parents/carers that will replace our usual hands-on transition activities this year. This will include a new transition section on the school website – available from 8th July -which will include video tours, welcome information, and teacher/class details. There will be a section for each year group, including Nursery and Reception.</p> <p>Transition is an important time and we of course understand that children and parents/carers want to be prepared. We hope that these videos and packs will provide the information and reassurance needed before we break for the summer. We are also reviewing the timetable and back to school plans for the new autumn term to ensure children are re-introduced to school and their new class settings appropriately.</p> <p>A huge amount of planning, time and preparation is required to ensure that we are as successful as we can be in this area, and guidance around the September term is still evolving, so please continue to be patient while our teaching staff continue to develop their plans.</p>
<p>Will we be told who will be teaching our children next year before the end of this term?</p>	<p>Yes. Please see above for details of timings.</p>

Will class groups be maintained into the new academic year?	Yes, they will.
Will there be additional transition activity at the start of the new term?	Our teachers are evolving their transition plans to reflect the specific needs of their year groups, classes and children and will continue to do so as the guidance evolves. We are skilled in transition planning and execution and working to ensure all children transition as smoothly as possible despite the unusual circumstances.
How are new Nursery and Reception children being transitioned this year?	<p>Due to the restrictions, there will sadly not be an induction for Reception or Nursery during the summer term and we have put an alternative plan in place.</p> <p>Reception information for parents and children was sent out 22nd June. Nursery information will be sent out on 29th June. The information includes a timeline of induction activities that will take place in the first two weeks of term in September, although these dates may be subject to change in the light of further guidance.</p> <p>Reception induction includes stay and play sessions with groups of just 15 children attending each session. There will then be a part-time week and then full time start date of 21st September.</p> <p>Nursery induction includes sessions throughout the day of 7/8th September then staggered start dates begin from 14th September.</p> <p>Parents/carers have also been informed that a transition tab will be added to the website as of 1st July. This will include the school prospectus and a presentation which is usually shown during induction sessions. The presentation has been extended and is written to be shared with children, introducing staff and the learning areas in the classrooms and around school.</p> <p>Video messages from class teachers will also be uploaded from 8th July.</p>
I don't want my child to return to school until the government mandates it. What are your plans for long-term home-schooling plans?	We are not anticipating that 'home schooling' is going to be permanent arrangement and it is clear from recent announcements that the government do not anticipate this either. Once the government states that it is safe for children to return to school, they will be expected to do so. If we find ourselves in a situation come September where children are still unable to return to school, we will again review our home-schooling provision – but it is important parents/carers recognise the constraints of this and review the home schooling section above.
Will Busy Bodies reopen this term?	No, Busy Bodies will remain closed until at least the start of the new term in September due to the restrictions currently in place.

Will Busy Bodies return to normal in September?	We hope Busy Bodies will once again be open and offering a full wraparound provision from September, but as at the time of writing, we are unable to confirm this as we are awaiting Government guidance. Will we advise parents via the usual channels as and when we know more.
Will priority be given to key workers at Busy Bodies when it reopens?	So long as it is safe to do so and we do not have to maintain 'bubbles' in school, we would like to return to the previous before and after school provision that our parents/carers were accessing prior to lockdown. We know that for many parents this is a vital provision. Our decision making will naturally be guided by the latest guidance and we communicate more about the reopening plans nearer the time.
Safety and wellbeing	
I am concerned about my child's emotional wellbeing. What can the school do to help?	There are a number of links on the school website under the Wellbeing tab. These are checked and updated regularly by a member of the school wellbeing team and we would encourage you to utilise these resources first.
What measures does the school have in place to protect the wellbeing and safety of children and staff in school?	We have implemented an exhaustive set of measures including risk assessments, shielding at risk members of staff, establishing class 'bubbles', social distancing measures, closing all non-essential parts of school (e.g. office, kitchens), signage and floor markings, one way systems, PPE and hand sanitising/washing stations. Details on the steps we have taken can be found on the school website under the Covid-19 tab.
Contacting school	
Why is school no longer responding to parent/carer correspondence?	It's not the case that school is not replying to correspondence from parents. We maintain an 'open door' policy and this has not changed. It is vital parents/carers be reassured they are able to contact school and will receive the appropriate attention. However, we also ask that parents understand the current climate means it may take longer than usual to reply to some enquiries, and in some cases, a personal reply will not be possible. We are currently receiving a volume of correspondence relating to current provision and individual return to school requests. This FAQ addresses these questions and we would urge parents/carers to read this before contacting school.
I want to contact school. How should I do this?	Please email enquiry@boldmere.bham.sch.uk and mark for the attention of the head teacher.
I want to contact Governors. How should I do this?	Please email enquiry@boldmere.bham.sch.uk and mark for the attention of the Governors. Emails are passed on upon receipt.
Do school Governors continue to meet and be involved in decision making?	Yes. The Chair of Governors has been in regular contact with the Senior Leadership Team. The full governing board continues and meets virtually via Microsoft Teams (video conference) on a regular basis.

<p>What can we do to help school?</p>	<p>We have been genuinely moved by the kind words and support of so many parents/carers since lockdown was introduced. This has been the most challenging time we have ever faced in education.</p> <p>All Boldmere School staff have been impacted by Covid-19 in one way or another, and, like you, we all also have lives outside of school we have to manage. Many of our staff are parents too, so face a similar challenge to balancing childcare, home schooling and family life with their job. The pressure on individuals and the expectation on schools continues to be incredibly high so it is absolutely right that the Senior Leadership Team and Governors keep the safety and wellbeing of our staff at the forefront of our planning and management.</p> <p>Regrettably, there is very little parents can currently do to help school at this time except to respect the timetable and process put in place for those children now attending school, keep up to date with our communications, and restrict contact to all but the most essential.</p> <p>We can all help each other by being kind, supporting one another and understanding that this is a completely unprecedented time and we are all doing the very best we can.</p>
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