

11<sup>th</sup> June 2020,

Dear Parent/Guardian/Carer,

**Re: Wider Opening of Schools for Reception, Year 1, Year 6, Year 10 and Year 12.**

I write to you, as outlined in my letter to you on 20.5.20, following three days of further detailed discussions with Trustees, school leaders, reviewing the very thorough planning undertaken, the associated risk assessments, which were completed by our external health and safety contractor, and the follow-up site visits by myself, our Strategic Safeguarding Lead and Teaching School Director, in all five schools to match practice to paperwork and importantly, to gain an understanding of what your child would actually experience on return to school.

As previously stated, our utmost priority is the safety of pupils and staff. As a Trust, we pride ourselves in putting people first, indeed our most important 'key objective' is to provide the best possible school experience for every child. At this most challenging time, it is extremely difficult to guarantee everyone's safety, to eradicate all risk and to provide a high quality experience for all children, whilst the chosen year groups return to school. Our detailed risk assessment is aimed at mitigating the risk of the spread of Coronavirus and yet, it is as a result of the actions we would be required to take to do this, that I believe we would not be able to provide a high quality experience. That said, I must praise your headteachers and their staff for the level of attention to detail in their tireless preparation, how hard they have all worked and how they have put young people first in all of their thinking.

We know that the Coronavirus situation may be with us for some time and as a result, we have been planning for the longer-term and what school may look like in September. Unless there are significant changes in Public Health England's North West 'R' rating or the government's guidance to schools on wider opening, for example reducing the 2m distancing to 1m, it is difficult to see how, adhering to the requirements, what we can offer will be worth more than the risks involved. Physical numbers, safety requirements and equipment currently prevent us from delivering all we planned. For this reason, we will not now open schools more widely from Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June.

In primary schools, current capacity to cover all potential pupils in the required reduced class sizes, in some cases a classroom of six, means not enough teachers to cover all classes or simply not enough classrooms for all pupils in all three designated years. The reality would be an offer of part-weeks or alternate weeks in school, or to cater for only one or two year groups, with very limited remote learning for all the other year groups not in school, as all available staff are used to cover the number of groups needed. This provision would see pupils not taught by their class teacher and not having free time with their friends, restricted to the same seat for extended periods, operating in 'safety bubbles', which we think is not what the majority of pupils and parents had hoped for. We all want to return to as near as 'normal' as we can as soon as possible and we are keen to re-open fully for all our children, however, we need to be sure about systems and practice and as parents, you need to be safe in the knowledge that your children are safe and will have a positive experience.

As things stand, I am not comfortable, as CEO with ultimate responsibility for the day-to-day running of Omega MAT schools, and would not wish my own children to have experienced this level of



provision. Having personally looked round schools over the last two days, the restrictions on access, no shared resources, limited movement around school, rigorous social distancing and containment, the signs, toilet regimes, cleaning and barriers, all present a more hostile reality in comparison to the usual friendly, welcoming environment that we all value and which existed before lockdown. This is not only alien to the culture pupils know, but may pose a longer-term threat to pupils' learning and how comfortable they feel in school, when we can achieve successfully a full return to school. Given that we will have only four school weeks left, a mere twenty days to the end of term, we are concerned that the negative impact may well outweigh any gain for the children.

I am aware that you may well not all agree with this decision and it may be disappointing for the children. I am keen for you to know the detail in order to understand and make more informed decisions yourselves and as always, I welcome your views. Our approach will be to continue to plan for the wider opening, a return as soon as possible and the longer-term. We will be able to do this, if parents tell us if they would like a place once they are fully aware of what this entails. With reduced numbers or a change in guidance, we will be able to accommodate pupils in a more meaningful way.

By the middle of next week, each school will have provided you with clear details of the work undertaken in your school and what any return to school would currently look like for your child. Headteachers will then survey your views, as to whether you would like a place for your child to be available before the summer holidays. We will then review our decision, as to how we manage this. In our opinion, the benefits must outweigh the risks for the majority and any provision must be meaningful and manageable to both pupils and staff.

We will of course keep this situation under daily review, but will remain cautious, phased and participative in our response and will contact you as soon as we are able to make any change.

We will of course remain open for all Key Workers' children and our most vulnerable pupils, as we have done throughout. Uptake for this provision has been increasing quite sharply in recent days, which in itself has compounded the problem in planning to manage pupil numbers in school.

We will of course continue to provide remote learning for all years and all of our staff are working hard to enhance this provision and learn from best practice. We want also to provide 'more for all', rather than 'a little for a few'. We hope to host more live lessons, provide focus sessions on transition, counselling and individual face to face sessions in school with subsequent personalised work for all years.

We will, in line with government guidance, offer face to face support for Year 10 and Year 12, supplementing their remote learning, which, as outlined by the DfE, will remain the predominant mode of education for the remainder of the academic year. In the immediate term, this will be a remote pastoral review, with further arrangement provided by GSHS in the coming days.

I thank you for your patience, and hope we can count on your understanding and support, as any decisions taken are in the best interests of our young people and based on your responses.

Yours sincerely,



Jon Wright, Chief Executive Officer,  
Omega Multi-Academy Trust.