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Monday 8th June 2020

COVID-19 and Hawthorns School closure update

Dear Parent/Carer,

I write to hopefully clarify where we are up to regarding wider opening here at Hawthorns.

Tameside Council – following medical guidance from Public Health England – has asked all schools in the borough to postpone wider re-opening until the 22nd June at the earliest. This is due to a rise in the 'R' number above 1 in the area – this indicates that the reproduction rate of the virus locally has gone up, increasing the risk of a second spike of the pandemic. Hopefully this is just a temporary measure and the R number falls again, but it is a reminder of the volatility of the virus still at the moment. I have published the letter from Tameside on our website along with this update.

Even before this recent turn of events, we have been very cautious about the prospects for wider opening. All along since the start of the lockdown we have prioritised the safety of children, families and staff in our decision-making, even if this has led to some criticism and frustration from a minority who do not see the overall picture that we are dealing with. We will continue to put safety first. We will also honour the commitment to keep the school open for the children of designated keyworkers and those children who have some form of social care support at present.

Here at Hawthorns we are currently in the middle of a risk assessment process as set out and published by our Trust to work out what we may/may not be able to offer in the coming weeks. We are different to mainstream schools in that our children will not be able to follow the social distancing guidelines and procedures that you see on the tv and read about online. Our plans will work around the viability of operating 'bubble' classes isolated from each other when in the building. This will be compromised by two factors – the number of staff that will be available to operate these classes, and the space available. The latter fact is a particular challenge here at Hawthorns because we are a school that has twice as many pupils and adults that the building is designed to cater for, which in turn increases the potential risk for spreading the virus if an infected person attends the school.

A lot of work is currently being undertaken to make the building as safe as we can do at the current time. We are re-thinking our routines, our circulation routes for the movement of people in the building, and of course all of our cleaning regimens. The outdoor space available will be compromised soon when building work starts on siting some mobile classrooms on our middle playground. This is necessary to accommodate the additional numbers of pupils registering with us in September.

We understand there is still a great deal of anxiety around wider opening and the return to school for your child. From the contact we are making with you as part of our risk assessment process at the moment, the majority of you think the timing is too soon and that September is likely to be a more sensible option. The recent rise in the 'R' number locally will only have made you more certain about this. I can only echo what has been stated before – we will honour this decision and we will not pursue any family for non-attendance at school for the rest of this school year.

We cannot at this stage say what September will look like. Full or partial opening will be determined by the guidance from national Government when it becomes available. We know the length of the lockdown will have had a significant impact on the majority of children at Hawthorns, with routines, structures and some of the specialised provision all needing to be re-learned. It is our anticipation that it will take half the year to recover to the place we were at before the lockdown started, and we will need to be patient and to work hard to achieve this. We will ease the children back into the curriculum and take some time to ensure they become settled again.

I will update you again as our plans to gradually re-open become more concrete. When we have more clarity and guidance about September I will share this with you also. In the meantime, please continue to keep yourselves as safe and as healthy as possible. If you have any questions or queries please stay in touch with your child's class team, or contact one of our Deputies Mrs Sarno or Mrs Fitton, who are working in school with me throughout this challenging period.

Take care,

Pierre Coiffait

Pierre Coiffait,

Head of School