

25 May 2020

Dear Colleagues,

First of all, I would like to thank you for the magnitude of your commitment and effort over the last few weeks by ensuring that our Trust schools have remained open for our most vulnerable children and those of our critical workers. I remain inspired by your resilience and optimism and share the immense pride and gratitude expressed by trustees and governors that you have all endeavoured to do your very best in such uncertain times. I know that so many of you 'have gone the extra mile' by supporting those colleagues and family members who have frail health and who are deemed vulnerable, taking on additional duties and often putting other people's needs above your own.

During this overwhelmingly difficult time, you have stayed true to our values of resilience, care and compassion for others. Thank you so much.

As a Trust, whilst we have supported the government's mandate to keep schools open, we have worked hard to make sure our decision-making has had the interests of all our stakeholders at heart based on some simple, key principles:

- Prioritising the health and well-being of our staff and children
- Playing a constructive role in supporting critical workers to have access to quality childcare so that they have been able to attend to the needs of our nation
- Prioritising the well-being of our vulnerable children
- Ensuring strong support for parents/carers in order to ease the burden of home education by setting quality work and developing a range of resources to support effective learning

I have been truly amazed by the personal investment you have all made. The digital leadership across the Trust has supported strong communication and fantastic distance learning opportunities; I will be forever indebted to those of you who have been using and developing new technologies to make sure our staff and families stay in touch. I include in this those colleagues who have recently been appointed to Doncaster UTC from September and who, as yet, have no formal obligations to our Trust. Many have taken time to develop exceptional bridging projects, resources and videos to support the transition from Year 11 into Post 16, ensuring our students get the best start into our Trust's 6<sup>th</sup> form. This work is in addition to the many duties they have been obliged to undertake in their current schools. Thank you so much for your incredible commitment to our young people and families. We are lucky to have you.

I have also been impressed by so many of you taking time out of your day to ring and contact parents and students, reassuring them and helping to mitigate the feelings of isolation and loneliness whilst living in uncertainty. There have also been so many small but heroic actions by individuals and, whilst there are too many to mention, I am aware that one colleague has been busy supporting Doncaster Royal Infirmary to make sure their PPE equipment is fit for purpose.

After several weeks of self-isolation, social distancing, and the development of a raft of new health and safety protocols there is evidence that national COVID19 infection rates are falling and that many areas across the country are experiencing a 'flattening of the curve'.

Although I believe all data should be considered with circumspection it is now prompting government and schools to consider how we transition into the next phase which will appropriately prioritise health concerns, whilst at the same time, start to build capacity in our schools, ensuring we can better meet the educational needs of our communities.

The trustees, headteachers and governors appreciate the challenges of meeting the government's directive to plan for a phased return of some children to school from the 1 June and the request to admit a higher proportion of children. We recognise the challenges and concerns of all our stakeholders.

Since the announcement, the Trust has taken numerous measures to canvass a range of views including staff, parents, the local authority and of course, Public Health, about a possible, planned return. It is recognised by the Trust Board that all schools have very different contexts, and it is not possible to mandate a set approach to implement this policy. The Trust has taken the view that, although it is the Board's ultimate responsibility to account for the management of the implementation of this directive, a 'one size fits all' approach would not be appropriate. It has, however, asked that each headteacher and local governing body undertake a series of actions and follow a set of principles to ensure they can assure themselves of the health and safety of all its staff and children. The response can best be described as 'monitor and adapt' approach. Each school has been asked to use the government's framework and guidance tools, feedback from staff and parents as well as robust guidance from the Trust's Health and Safety Adviser ProActive to establish a bespoke plan for their school. As a result, some schools in the Trust will start to bring more pupils/students into school from the 1 June and others will wait until 8 June. This is because not all schools can immediately accommodate a significant increase in pupil/student numbers related to challenges around classroom sizes, availability of certain hygiene products and some staff not being available to work in school due to their health. All schools will, however, be operating a staggered approach from 8 June which will be reviewed and modified daily depending on each set of circumstances.

Although it is our intention to meet most of the government recommendations by the end of the school year, we will only do so when we feel confident that we have taken every practical measure to manage and mitigate any identifiable health and safety risks. The health and safety reviews undertaken by our Trust expert will be fundamental to informing any decisions we take, as will the views of our staff in terms of what we can do to support their safe return to work.

We cannot, of course, eliminate all risk and the approach is very much dependent on staff returning to schools in a phased approach. At this point, employees classed as vulnerable will continue to work from home, wherever possible. We will continue to closely follow DFE guidance regarding employees living with someone who is vulnerable. We are also asking staff to let their headteachers know of any underlying health conditions that the school may be unaware of. Any staff feeling nervous about returning for any reason should work with their headteacher so that we can establish a separate risk assessment.

We appreciate that these are very challenging times for us all; but we feel our approach is a sensible and pragmatic one which allows headteachers and local governing bodies the authority to evaluate and modify their approach as required. You may be aware that the Mayor of Doncaster, Ros Jones,

issued a letter late on Friday afternoon expressing some of her concerns about the opening of all schools from 1 June, which we are sharing with you. Whilst we have shared all of her concerns at some point over the last few weeks, we have fully consulted with the local authority who are supportive and appreciative of our Trust's response. We now feel confident that we can start to safely increase our student/pupil numbers.

Thank you once again for all your support and acts of kindness over the last few weeks. We are all adapting to this new reality which requires us to work together to find the best way forward. We will continue to monitor and adapt our approach as we continue to support you find the best possible solutions for your school context.

Take care and please know our thoughts are with you all.

Helen Redford-Hernandez

CEO – Brighter Futures Learning Partnership Trust