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16 June 2020

Dear Parent or Carer

We are writing to you with our next update for parents and carers across all six of our trust schools. Last Monday, we welcomed reception-aged pupils back into our two primary schools and over the next two weeks and up until the summer holiday, we will be able to have pupils and students in reception and years one, six, ten and twelve back in our schools. Those primary-aged pupils will be in almost full-time and those secondary-aged students will be in part-time. The parents and carers of those pupils and students who are coming back in have received detailed information on how that provision will look. In addition, we continue to offer up to full-time provision for the children of critical workers and we are typically seeing around 150 such children across our schools each day.

Since 23 March when schools closed to the majority of young people as part of the national fight against Covid-19, our schools have not closed. We have remained open through school holidays, including bank holidays, for the children of critical workers and, by doing so, have enabled over 4,000 work shifts to take place. We have now brought more pupils and students back into school, doing everything the government has asked of us, in very challenging circumstances. It is down to the extraordinary hard work and commitment of our school staff and our schools' leaders that this has been able to happen, with constructive and practical support from two local authorities, local trade union representatives and seven governing boards.

The last three months have been the most difficult that schools and many families across the country have ever known. We want to say again how incredibly grateful we are for the support we have received from parents, carers and our communities. We have never known anything like it. We hope we have managed to acknowledge and thank you for every kind message that has been sent. Please accept our sincere thanks again. We have also had contact from parents and carers with questions, queries or concerns. Again, we hope we have answered these honestly and fully. As we have said many times before, we won't all always agree but please be assured that we are doing everything we can to make the best decisions and to communicate them to you as clearly as we can. At times, we have faced decisions where there simply is no good option, but in every decision we have taken we have tried to put what is best for all young people first, within the difficult constraints imposed on all of us by this pandemic.

In the last few weeks, there has been a huge amount of debate over what should happen with schools over the next few weeks, in September and beyond. There has been coverage in the media that has, at times, been quite misleading; different parts of the government have made announcements about school plans that have come as surprises to school leaders or to other parts of the government; the Department for Education has provided an overwhelming number of updates for schools but as I have shared with you before, much of the most important information has not been released in a timely enough fashion for schools to plan safely. Unfortunately, there also appear to be some people on different sides of the political spectrum who wish to use school "re-opening" for their own ends and have made some ill-informed, inaccurate, unhelpful or critical comments about schools and the people who lead them or work in them. From conversations we have had with parents and with school



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leaders right across the region, it is clear that this is causing real confusion about what is happening locally and nationally and why it is happening. We hope we can address some of these misconceptions and provide some more clarity here. Please excuse the length of this letter but there is a lot to cover!

### **Primary school “re-opening”**

On Sunday 10 May, the prime minister announced that the government hoped primary schools would begin welcoming back pupils in reception, year one and year six from 1 June followed by all primary year groups for the last month before the summer holiday. On 11 May, the government published guidance on how schools must plan and this has been updated with additional guidance published a number of times since. In Hull and East Riding, many primary schools delayed the restart for one week in response to information that showed the local infection rate may still be too high.

The government directed schools to operate with groups of no more than 15 pupils, each of which would require at least one member of staff and its own room. In normal times, a class of 30 required one member of staff and one room. Under these new arrangements, 30 pupils require two members of staff and two rooms. This means that most primary schools can accommodate no more than 50% of its pupils at any time. This has been made repeatedly clear to the government by school leaders for the last four weeks. On Wednesday last week, the Secretary of State for Education dropped plans to bring back all primary pupils before the summer. This is for no other reason than the fact that primary schools do not have sufficient space or additional staff available to operate a full school with classes of 15.

Yesterday, the government gave more guidance which now states that primary schools may bring in pupils from other year groups if they have capacity. However, this does not change the simple fact that without a significant number of extra classrooms and extra teachers, schools are unable to do this. Our primary schools are not able to take back pupils from year groups other than reception, year one and year six, unless they are the children of critical workers, between now and the summer break.

### **Secondary school “re-opening”**

On Sunday 10 May, the prime minister announced that the government hoped to bring year ten and twelve students back for some “face-to-face contact” with their teachers from 15 June. On Tuesday 12 May, the government published guidance for primary schools, changed the start date for year ten and twelve students to 1 June but did not publish specific secondary school guidance. On Monday 25 May the government published its guidance for secondary schools to open on 1 June but later that week on 28 May, the prime minister announced a return to the original date of 15 June. In the government’s secondary school guidance, schools were asked to maintain 2 metre social distancing (unlike in primary schools) and not to have more than 25% of the students in those two year groups at any one time.

We have developed our model for year ten and twelve based on this guidance and have achieved the target start date of 15 June. Our arrangements comply fully with the government’s guidance and although we are fortunate to have some large school sites, we are unable to bring more students in on any given day because we are complying with the 25% guidance.



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## One-to-one sessions for students in years 7 to 9

Yesterday, a further announcement was made that students in years 7 to 9 may be invited into school for one face-to-face meeting to catch up with them and support them with any academic or pastoral issues. This may only be done on an individual basis and we are not allowed to bring in groups or classes of students in these year groups. We are looking at how we might do this and will be in touch with parents and carers with children in these year groups shortly. We will also look at the feasibility of offering something similar for primary school pupils who may benefit.

## Online learning

Staff continue to work hard to support young people to learn from home when not in school. Like most schools, we have developed an online platform of work which pupils and students can access any time of the day. Work is generally set in 2 week blocks, with a key piece of work that can be submitted for feedback. From the first day of lockdown, we have had a process where any pupil or student can ask questions and get answers from their teachers or another subject specialist. Over the last few weeks, we have increased the number of video and/or narrated explanations and continue to do so. Where pupils or students are unable to access work online for whatever reason, we produce weekly paper packs of work. In a typical week we produce around 600 packs across our six schools.

There has been a great deal of discussion nationally and locally about whether schools should simply deliver a full timetable of lessons each day “live” using platforms such as Teams or Zoom. We have had some parents who have expressed a view that they would like their child to have access to “live” video teaching. We have had other parents who have explicitly asked us not to. This is one area where some will agree with what we are doing while some will disagree. We accept that.

We are very well aware that many fee-paying schools and a small number of state schools are offering “live” teaching. We also know that the vast majority of state schools are offering a hybrid model like ours. It is for each school to decide what best serves all the members of the community it serves and we would not question or criticise what others do. However, any school should only use teaching approaches that every one of its children can access. We serve every single member of our school communities equally and cannot exclude some young people from lessons simply because of where they live or because they cannot get access to the right equipment. At present nearly 10% of our young people do not have access to an appropriate device and/or have access to reliable broadband. Moving to a programme of live lessons would exclude at least 10% of our pupils/students and the figure is significantly higher when we take into account households with siblings where not every young person has their own device.

Furthermore, there remains little evidence that “live” teaching for school children is more effective than online teaching that involves use of recorded explanations. The most useful report on this, from the highly respected Education Endowment Foundation, can be found here:

<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-supporting-students-to-learn-remotely/>



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We continue to develop our remote learning platform and pupils/students will have access to far more “on-demand” learning, including recorded sections of lessons from their teachers, recorded explanations and narrated demonstrations. “On-demand” learning ensures that families who are sharing a device can access material at a time that works for them. This way of learning will be further heightened by creating greater opportunities for pupils and students to take part in class “chats” and receive “live” answers to their questions. We hope that this will also enable us to offer more personalised learning for students and pupils with SEND. We will write another communication later this week explaining how our next phase of remote learning will look.

As we develop this further, it is even more important that nobody is left behind. Our trust board share our concern about the lack of IT access for some. The government has made an effort to solve some of this by providing laptops for some groups of pupils/students, but this scheme is limited to year 10 students and young people with a social worker. It does not help pupils and students in other year groups and there are significant delays in supply. We are absolutely delighted that our trust board has agreed a significant investment of around £200,000 to improve access to IT hardware for pupils and students who don’t have it. This will be funded in the same way as our Be Well support programme and will not come from the general government funding our schools receive. This is a really significant step forward. It will enable us to develop remote learning further in an equitable way and demonstrates again our commitment to all our young people.

### **Summer schooling**

There has recently been some talk of summer school, holiday clubs and catch up programmes. At this stage we know no more than what was contained in the prime minister’s recent brief comments and what we have read in the newspapers this weekend. No further detail has been provided to schools. We will, of course, share any information we receive in due course.

### **September and beyond**

Perhaps the biggest question of all is “what happens in September”. The government has not yet produced guidance for schools, which is perhaps understandable given that we do not know where the infection will be in September. However, we do need to know soon what the government’s thinking is so we can share that with you. It is our real hope that all pupils and students are back in school full time sooner rather than later. There is no group of people who want our students back more than those people who have devoted their careers to teaching and supporting all young people – school staff.

It is clear that the factors that will decide whether young people are back full time or part time are the rates of infection nearer the time and the decisions that the government takes regarding social distancing and other measures. The sizes of groups we are able to teach and the type of social distancing measures required will determine the capacity that each school in the country can accommodate. We are now planning in detail for a number of scenarios for September and will keep you fully informed on which is our likely working model for September. We are planning for how we might accommodate all pupils and students on our sites and also how we would operate with a range



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of reduced capacities. We are re-planning curriculums and further developing our IT so that if we are required to operate a reduced capacity, our young people have the best face to face teaching, supported by really well planned remote working. Whatever September looks like, we will work really hard to catch all pupils/students up with anything they have missed and ensure they thrive in the future. Nothing is more important to any of us than that.

### **Future examinations**

We have also heard some unhelpful and ill-informed talk about what might happen to exams in summer 2021. This talk does nothing for the young people and the families of young people who are due to take exams. As things stand, the 2021 exam season is scheduled to take place. Clearly, we do not know where we will be with the virus by then but what we do know is that there is much more time for Ofqual (the exams regulator), the Department for Education and schools to plans than there was this summer with the very sudden cancellation of exams. Students and parents should assume at this point that exams will go ahead. If the situation requires changes to be made, there are a wide range of things that exams boards can do, including reducing content, introducing more optional questions, having an element of teacher assessment or other measures. What is absolutely certain is that Ofqual will once again apply measures to ensure students will not be disadvantaged. The same proportion of students will be awarded each grade as in previous years and students' results will not be lower than previous year groups. The best thing all students can do is to continue working hard. We will help anyone who needs to catch up and we will ensure they are thoroughly prepared for exams and assessments.

### **Finally**

The last few weeks, in many ways, have been the most difficult of the crisis so far. At times it has felt like the strong national and community spirit of the first few weeks has disappeared. We are probably less clear about what is expected of us all, we are still worried about our health and the health of loved ones but now many also have very real fears about their businesses, their livelihoods and the longer term prospects of their children who will have missed a third of a school year. The public behaviour of some people has become almost intolerable and discussions in the media and on social media have become angrier and less tolerant. The strong community spirit and sense of team work amongst our school staff remains and I have no doubt that will get even stronger as more young people come back into our schools. We absolutely can't wait to have them all back! Similarly, our partnership with parents and carers is as strong as it has ever been and we hope that it will remain so. All our strategic decisions are collective decisions taken across all schools, with the involvement of our governing bodies, seeking to balance the best interests of all our young people and families. And we will continue to do our very best to continue to tell you what we know, what we are doing and why we are doing it.



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Wishing you and your families all the very best.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jonny Uttley".

Jonny Uttley  
CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "S. Ratheram".

Scott Ratheram  
Executive Principal



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