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*Headteacher Lynn Harrison*

22<sup>nd</sup> May 2020

Dear Parents / Carers,

### **Government plan to re-open schools commencing on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020.**

As we are sure you are aware schools have been asked to undertake a RISK ASSESSMENT to determine as to whether it is safe for children and staff to return to school, with planning for this starting FROM the 1<sup>st</sup> June. This document arrived in schools on Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> May.

Our Cluster of Head Teachers and Governors have spent much time analysing and discussing the current situation in an attempt to see how we proceed particularly ensuring the safety of all our children and staff.

#### **First, we looked to the facts:**

The R for the North West region is 0.73 and rising compared to 0.4 in London.

As an authority Cumbria currently has the 6th highest number of cases per head of population.

COVID-19 rates in Barrow are the highest in the UK.

South Lakes is also extremely high.

Carlisle ranks 9th in the UK with regard to Covid-19 cases per head of population.

Cumbria has the 3rd highest death rates in the country per head of population.

Death rates are currently higher than when schools were first closed.

#### **Then we looked to what you are saying:**

When we canvassed Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 parents last week, and have listened to many others during our phone calls, more than three quarters of you said you did not believe it was safe for your children to return to school yet.

#### **Then we looked to the guidance:**

We find conflicting advice and very mixed messages: here are a few examples:

*"The susceptibility to infection of younger children (up to age 11 to 13) might be lower than for adults, but the degree of confidence in this is low. For older children there is not enough evidence yet to determine whether susceptibility to infection is different to adults."*

*"There is no evidence to suggest that children transmit the virus any more than adults. Some studies suggest younger children may transmit less, but this evidence is mixed and provides a low degree of confidence at best."*

Another key issue is not just children infecting children but asymptomatic children transmitting to other children who then pass the virus to adults.

### **Finally; we asked staff:**

It is clear that our wonderful staff all want to ensure that children return to school as soon as possible, but they believe the return should be in such a way that ensures the safety and wellbeing of both the children and of their colleagues.

As you are aware, staff have been calling you regularly combined with setting work during the lockdown.

They have also volunteering in the school hub (including during their holidays and Bank Holidays) in order to support our NHS and critical workers. It has been very challenging, but I am sure you will agree Irthington staff have and continued to do everything they can to support the children and yourselves.

We also recognise that Staff will understandably take advice from their Union(s) and Professional associations.

Given the facts; we are clear that we will undertake the following careful steps to re-open school when the time is right;

### **Phase 1:**

1. Close our HUB school.
2. Hub schools will then be deep cleaned in preparation for some children returning.
3. Complete the Local Authority official Risk Assessment and discuss with Governors / Staff to ensure it is completed to their satisfaction.

### **Phase 2:**

4. Risk assessment allowing, Irthington will open on the **8<sup>th</sup> June** for **Critical workers and vulnerable pupils only (HUB Children)**. If your children did not attend the hub and you are a critical worker and you are no longer able to work from home or provide childcare at home, please email me to discuss a possible place at school. [head@irthingtonvillage.cumbria.sch.uk](mailto:head@irthingtonvillage.cumbria.sch.uk)
5. School will prepare classrooms for Year 6 for opening **from 15<sup>th</sup> June**

Once we know that we have got it right in terms of social distancing and Health and Safety guidelines then we will consider inviting Year 1 and Reception. Nursery will be considered after the other groups are safely back at school. We will keep you updated weekly.

Understandably, Irthington Village School will not be the same school as we have previously known it.

- Social distancing will be paramount (for parents, children and staff).
- children will be in small groups (Bubbles) with a teacher they may not have previously been taught by.
- Lunches will be packed lunched (initially brought from home) and will be consumed in the classrooms.
- Each child will unfortunately have to be in their own space (sat at their designated desk) to protect themselves and our staff,
- There will be no soft furnishings, soft toys, teddy etc, and very sadly, no comforting hugs or hand holding.
- Some staff will be wearing masks and other PPE in certain situations e.g. first aid.
- Start and finish times will be staggered and attendance will not be full time as we cannot accommodate everyone as the maximum class size will be 6 - 8.
- Children will not mix with other children outside their bubble, they will have staggered lunch breaks, and playtimes.

- Breaks will be shorter and in small groups, therefore children will not be allowed to play games together or share toys and resources.

At all times we will be reviewing the data in Cumbria and reviewing the risks. This means, if data improves dramatically and the R number reduces then we will open sooner. It also means that if the data does not show a downward trend then we will delay opening in line with keeping your children and our staff safe.

As a Head Teacher, my job over the last few weeks has been one of challenge, soul searching and dilemma. Please be in no doubt **I absolutely want to provide an education for your children**. I hope you have felt supported at home with the work we have been providing and through the 'catch up' phone calls. Your co-operation and engagement has been wonderful and we thank you all for the amazing job you are doing; we have a very supportive community and sincerely hope that this continues.

But we are now at a crossroads and I honestly don't want to make life any more difficult for you as some of you return to work, partners return to work, and you need access to school. But I also want to ensure that anything we do does not mean there could be life or death consequences. Therein lies the cause of my many sleepless nights. I will only do what my conscience allows me to do safely and the School Governors support this approach. So, our planning to re-open school will be done carefully.

As we move forward some of you will support us wholeheartedly and some of you will be a little disappointed. But our staff, Governors and I can only do what we can humanly do with such enormous decisions resting on our shoulders. These decisions have always and will continue to be based on facts, discussion with relevant stakeholders, the Local Authority, and most importantly, thorough assessment of risks.

We will keep you updated on a regular basis particularly if anything changes.

Yours sincerely,

*Lynn Harrison*

Headteacher.