

Vantage Academy Trust, Covid-19 and the wider opening of schools.



Plans to more widely open our schools and keep your children safe

The safe return to school and to education is a key priority for us all. As you know, schools have not been closed since the lockdown started and, through the last nine weeks including holidays and bank holidays, our Vantage schools have provided education and care for every child of a key worker, every vulnerable child and every child with an EHCP who wanted it. In addition, we have provided weekly on-line education as well as packs for parents without internet access. I am proud of all of our staff who have continued to work through the peak of the outbreak with good humour and care for their pupils.

We are now ready, following Government guidelines, to more widely open schools to more pupils in a measured and sensible way. In the comments we have had from parents, the key issue is “what are you doing to keep my children safe?” In the rest of this document, I will set out the general principles of the actions we are taking to allow you to decide whether or not you wish to send your children back to school.

The first thing to say is that no school can eliminate risk entirely. We balance risk all the time in our lives, for example, by going in the car or on a plane, and we have done so during the Coronavirus outbreak by going to the shops and going out to exercise. In each case, we balance the positives against the negatives and make a decision. It is fair to say that the peak appears to be over, cases in the population are dropping and, in the children across the Trust in the last 9 weeks, we have had no reports of any staff or pupils contracting the virus from their interactions within the school environment.

In order to admit more pupils, we intend to do the following:

- Calculate the maximum number of pupils (plus 2 staff) that any of our classrooms can take and maintain 2m social distancing. That will give us a maximum number of pupils we feel that we can safely house in each room.
- Each class will have up to 2 “bubbles”, each with 2 staff and the number of pupils that can be housed. This will never exceed 15 pupils, but is likely to be less (an average of about 10).
- This means that if we have 30 pupils in Y6, for example, we may only have room to take back 20 pupils in 2 groups of 10.

Pupils in 3 year old Nursery, Reception, Y1 and Y6 will be invited back to school on a staggered programme. Places will be allocated on the following priorities:

Priority	
1	Key worker children
2	Vulnerable children
3	Pupils with an EHCP
4	Other pupils on a first come first served basis

Once all our places are taken, we will maintain a waiting list. However, we will not exceed the maximum number of pupils that we can safely house in each room.

In addition, pupils who are extremely clinically vulnerable (i.e. have received a letter from the NHS to shield), should not return to school until instructed to do so.

Pupils who are classed as clinically vulnerable (i.e. have an underlying disease but didn't get an NHS letter) should seek medical advice, but the choice is yours as to coming back to school or not.

- We will amend our behaviour policy, so that any child who wilfully refuses to socially distance and follow safety rules will be excluded for the duration of the continued lockdown. Poor behaviour will not be allowed to put others in danger.
- Children cannot bring in items from home, including lunchboxes, and must have a school lunch, which is likely to be a 'grab bag' that we can dispose of safely.
- Children will not be required to wear uniform, but will be encouraged to wear fresh clothes each day.
- Parents who are in receipt of vouchers for free school meals will lose their entitlement when the pupils are provided with a lunch at school.
- The type and range of education offered will be different to normal. More individual work, probably more formal work, and playtimes will be significantly less interactive (no football or ball games, for example).
- Obviously, in Reception and Nursery, despite the teacher's best efforts, the maintenance of a 2m gap between pupils will be almost impossible, but the youngest pupils are the ones less likely to pass on the virus and have the mildest reaction to it.
- If any child in the 'bubble' shows any symptoms, we will inform all parents in the bubble and request 14 days isolation. If a symptomatic child tests negative, we will then invite pupils back in to school.

These points are intended to reassure, and inform you in order to make the correct decision for each of your children.

Parents who choose not to send their children back will not face any penalty or fines this term

The Timetable

The government will make a final decision whether or not schools should widen their numbers on 28th May. The Board of Directors of the Trust will also be discussing wider opening next week. They will check that all the risk assessments have been completed and that all possible safety precautions have been put in place to minimise the risk to all pupils and staff.

On the Monday following the half term holiday (1st June), the staff will be returning to school to be consulted on the new arrangements and trained regarding the changes we need to introduce. They will then spend the rest of the week preparing the school, setting up one-way systems, classes, removing and storing un-cleanable items and creating socially distancing learning spaces.

We also, during this time, need to set up a medical space, ensure sufficient supplies of protective equipment, soap, towels, cleaning materials, tissues, lidded bins, hand gel etc. are in school in sufficient quantities to allow us to open.

Pupils will start to return from 8th of June, class by class, over 2 weeks.

What we need you to do

You will, just after half term, get access to a detailed letter from your child's school. This will give precise details of:

The start and finish times of the school and which class will be starting on which day.

Where to drop your child off and at what time (this will be staggered).

Where and when to pick your child up – in the case of Y6, please tell school if they can go home alone.

Explain that the school day will be shorter than normal (approx. 4.5 hours) to allow for extra cleaning required in each room each day.

Please talk to your child about what we will expect in school (social distancing) and that they may see some staff in face masks and gloves at certain times of the day.

Pupils will not be given or allowed to bring face masks into school.

Please check the school website for letters and updates, and please read carefully any messages the school send out.

Remember to socially isolate when dropping off and picking up children.

Our staff are looking forward to getting back to school, we will take the best care we can of your children, we will of course treat them as we would want our own to be. It will be strange, but these are the first steps on the road to recovery, without risking the hard won gains from COVID-19.



Simon T Bramwell OBE

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