

HOLYWELL SCHOOL

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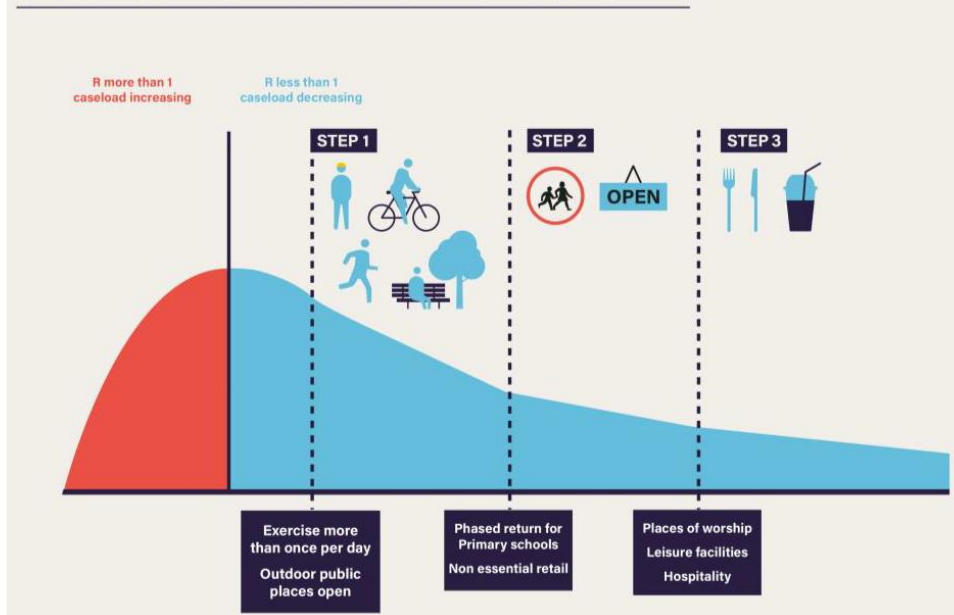
Update Letter 15-05-2020

Dear Students, Parents and Carers

I hope that this letter finds you well. It has been quite a week for education with all of the Government's guidance and new proposals. Thank you for your patience in waiting for us to get back to you with further details (we hadn't anticipated that, for the second time, our value of the month would be so pertinent!!). From the outset, let me stress that, if it were safe, we would love nothing more than to have every single Holywell student and staff member back on site, learning together and living life in all its fullness. Unfortunately, Covid-19 has other ideas and until it is safe, we must make extraordinary and courageous choices – our 'bottom line' is that we will not put student, staff or family safety in jeopardy.

On the 10th May 2020, the Prime Minister outlined the roadmap to recovery from the Coronavirus. He said there would be "a range of adjustments to current social distancing controls, timing these carefully according to both the current spread of the virus and the Government's ability to ensure safety. These will happen in "steps," as set out in the next chapter, with strict conditions to safely move from each step to the next."

Steps of adjustment to current social distancing measures



The second step, provisionally and conditionally set for 1st June involves a phased re-opening of schools: "Schools should prepare to begin to open for more children from 1 June. The Government expects children to be able to return to early years settings, and for Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 to be back in school in smaller sizes, from this point."

The rationale for Year 6 was as follows: "Year 6 children are finishing Key

Stage 2 and are preparing for the transition to secondary school, and will benefit immensely from time with their friends and teachers to ensure they are ready."

At Holywell, we initially wondered whether for Middle Schools, this may mean that Year 8 might be the first year group to return, however, the guidance went on to say:

"We encourage middle schools to do the same and welcome back children in year 6, to ensure national parity for children in this year group."

Since then, we have been inundated with guidance, checklists and revised guidance. They are all available online. There is a specific document aimed at parents and carers – click on this link: [Opening schools and educational settings to more pupils from 1 June: guidance for parents and carers](#). This is an ambitious programme. It is very dependent on 'the Science' and, as the Government commented:



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“dependent on whether the up-to-date assessment of the risk posed by the virus indicates it is appropriate to have larger numbers of children within schools. The safety of children and staff is our utmost priority”.

The safety of children and staff is definitely our priority at Holywell and, after an extensive risk assessment, we have concluded that it will not be safe enough to have all Year 6 students and Critical-Worker-students back on site on the 1st June nor will we be able to accommodate a full return for other year groups before the end of term. We are a large middle school and the Government proposals are clearly designed around the Primary School model. We simply cannot put in place the measures as described by the Government at this time. Government guidance states that:

“Any setting that cannot achieve these increases at any point because:

- there are not enough classrooms or spaces available in the setting
 - they do not have enough available teachers or staff to supervise the groups
- have flexibility but must first focus on continuing to provide places for priority groups (vulnerable children and the children of critical workers).”

Both of those criteria apply to Holywell when we reduce our group sizes across year groups.

We also have concerns around the DfE guidance re: social distancing in the school context:

“Children cannot be expected to remain 2 metres apart from each other and staff. In deciding to bring more children back to schools, DfE suggest that we work through the following hierarchy of measures:

- *avoiding contact with anyone with symptoms*
- *frequent hand cleaning and good respiratory hygiene practices*
- *regular cleaning of settings*
- *minimising contact and mixing”*

It has been a challenge to enforce social distancing with the critical-worker children in school over the last few weeks and to suddenly scale this up to a whole year group would be unworkable. Given the potential numbers involved (180+ students in Year 6), we believe that we will find it difficult to minimise contact and mixing and that the transmission possibilities will be increased. This will be too much of a risk to students and staff.

We also appreciate that we need to support families and parents to get back to work and, in the spirit of the original advice, we will actively look to increase the number of students in school – especially for families struggling with accessing technology. We are currently exploring different ways in which we can accommodate more students on site, whilst not compromising safety ... and when we say ‘more students’ we are specifically referring to Year 6 students. We are interested in finding out from Year 6 parents how many families would like to take up the offer of on-site learning and a short questionnaire will be sent to Year 6 families next week. With regard to the week commencing 1st June, we are anticipating continuing our critical-worker support programme and expanding to accommodate some Year 6 students the following week if there is the demand.

This will not be ‘normal’ school and plans will include key changes:

- Limiting class sizes to no more than 15 students
- Changing the timing of the school day to avoid a long lunchtime and having an earlier finish time
- Staggering break times
- Changes to what is taught and how it is taught
- Increased cleaning regimes
- Strict social distancing

Whilst we do not envisage being able to accommodate other year groups on site before the end of term for extended periods, we are thinking about planning ‘Keep-in-touch’ days for the other year groups. We are also hoping to organise some sort of ‘transition’ work for both our Year 8 students going on to Upper School and to our new Year 4 students.

I will send out further details of future provision next week and we will also share some of the lovely work which has been going on at home.

With all best wishes

MG Simpson

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