



The Consortium Trust

Where together excellence and pupils thrive

Weekly Staff briefing

15th May 2020

Dear Colleagues

What can I say, it has been yet another rollercoaster of a week! I continue to be amazed by the efforts that the majority of staff are going to, to support our communities and pupils. As you are now aware the government has stated that it 'expects,' if its covid-19 tests are met, that primary schools will extend the existing vulnerable and key worker child care offer to a more formal education provision for children in nursery, reception, year 1 and 6 from the 1st June and then look at extending the provision to all pupils from the 22nd June.

I have been working with our team and liaising with the DfE, Academy Leaders and the Local Authorities, I have reviewed a mountain of material, consulted with our Academy Heads and Trustees. I want to stress to you that I, and the central team are doing everything possible to support you to deliver the required provision as safely as possible.

Attached to this briefing is a letter that will be distributed to Parents and Carers later today, in that letter I outline clearly the pathway forward. I want to stress that we will only proceed with the plan if I and the Academy Heads are satisfied that we can mitigate risk to an acceptable level. Can I encourage you to read it in full including the links.

The Trust is currently, with school leaders, reviewing the school buildings to ensure that we can put in measures to keep everyone as safe as possible, we will be following PHE and DfE advice, we have already procured stocks of sanitiser, paper towels and cleaning products. We are currently sourcing PPE equipment for schools to use for intimate care, first aid and supporting children that may fall ill at school. The Central Office will reopen from the 1st June and the central team are ready to support all our colleagues working at schools throughout this period, although visits to schools are not permitted at this time other than for essential work.

I assure you that your health, safety and well-being is absolutely fundamental to the decisions I make. I am acutely aware of the anxieties that you may have and the Trust Board and I wish to be as caring and compassionate as possible, whilst meeting our obligations as public servants. I appreciate that there will be many questions and concerns you may have; to gain an immediate snap shot of staff views, we will be launching a staff online survey – please complete this as a matter of urgency as it will support our planning and ultimately support you. Within the first two weeks you will also be invited to a face to face return to work interview, to follow up on any concerns that you have. I have listened to the concerns of staff and Academy Heads and I hope that the following arrangements are an acknowledgement of this.

1. From the 22nd May, the five education centres close and we will have half term – all staff (less estates/caretaking/cleaning staff) will take the normal holiday – some of us have worked almost without a break since the middle of March – I feel it is essential for us to tackle the next seven weeks effectively an opportunity to recharge is important. This includes the ending of the current google-classroom provision.
2. Monday the 1st June, is and will remain a PD day – Academy Heads will brief local teams of the expectations regarding preparing to open our schools – all staff will be required to attend their school site for the PD day (as per their contract). It is really important that colleagues have the opportunity to meet and have the time to talk through plans and anxieties moving forward as a staff team. I wanted to ensure that you had that opportunity.

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While the Trust wishes to be as reasonable as possible with colleagues, I must also make it clear that we must and will work towards a more normal provision, we are after all educationalists, our duty is to teach children. I appreciate that some colleagues will need to move forward at different rates, but we all need to move forward. Please make use of your Well-being Champions and the employee support services including confidential counselling should you require it. Do remember that the Well-Being Champions and your line managers / Academy Heads may well be experiencing the same anxieties as you. Remember that kindness should be the starting point of any conversation.

From the 1st June all staff are required to attend their normal place of work and undertake the roles and responsibilities that can be reasonably expected of them. Obviously colleagues that are unwell or are shielding including expectant mothers should stay at home – where colleagues are well but unable to attend the school, you will be required to support the development of the Trust wide virtual classroom (Colleagues that are affected will receive further information from the Director of Primary Education on next steps). Over the past 8 weeks we have not required 'fit notes' or evidence why colleagues can't attend work, moving forward we will require this evidence in line with our normal staff absence policy. Please be aware that the government has revised the lists and categories of pre-existing conditions, do not assume that because you were on the list before you are still within this group.

Academy Heads and other local leaders will be keen to work with you and support you, we also have the large unknown of how many pupils will actually return to school on the 2nd June. Please discuss your particular situation and circumstances with your line manager; working together we can do this.

I stress again that it is not absolutely certain that the re-booting of the school system will commence on the 1st June, but it is the best 'guess' that we have based on the information to hand. We all need to prepare ourselves physically and mentally for the period ahead. I am hugely grateful for your continued support and determination.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne
CEO & Principal

Cc: Trust Board and Members–
Locality Committee members