

21st May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Executive Leadership Team and Board of Trustees at Victoria Academies Trust - I hope this letter finds you well.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for all that you are doing during these very difficult times. For those of you at home, supporting your children with their learning, it is most appreciated, especially as we know many of you will also be trying to work from home or support other members of your household or wider family. For those who are key workers, and whose children may be accessing the childcare our schools are providing, we also thank you all for everything that you are doing in such unprecedented times.

My main reason for writing to you is to update you on the position of Victoria Academies Trust following the government's announcement earlier last week regarding the possible wider opening of school to pupils from June 1st.

Over the past week, the Executive Leadership Team has worked with leaders of all schools to assess risks and discuss potential plans should the government decide to announce that schools can begin to reopen. We have also kept up to date with guidance and information provided by a range of sources, including government, Department of Education, unions, health professions and our own school communities. These plans would have to ensure that we can be as safe as we can for our pupils, families and staff. I am sure you will agree that making decisions as to whether schools should open to a wider number of pupils is not an easy one as we are still in the middle of a global pandemic during which we all remain at risk. As a Multi Academy Trust, the Board of Trustees are responsible for agreeing any decision, and the Executive Leadership Team met with Trustees last night in order for them to make an informed decision.

The outcome of this meeting was that in the current situation, with evidence and information available to schools, Victoria Academies Trust would NOT open to a wider number of pupils from June 1st in any of its schools. The reasons for this are set out below.

Trustees and Leaders have a duty of care to all staff, children and families in our schools and they will not be rushed to make a decision that could compromise the health and wellbeing of anyone in our school communities. We all want schools to open; for children to return, but will not do so until we feel we have the assurance that we can make it as safe as possible. Our position is that any reopening will be 'slow, steady and safe' to allow us to get things right - the stakes are too high to make mistakes.

At this time, 1st June is the date when schools 'may' be able to extend their opening arrangements. It is neither a fixed nor statutory date by which schools must open. Currently:

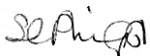
- We are working with government guidance which is rushed, changing on an almost daily basis, and often contradictory.
- We are still waiting to see the scientific evidence and be fully reassured that a return to school for more pupils can be done safely.
- We have not been informed that the government's own five key tests have been met to enable the country and schools to move to this next 'stage'.
- The government say they may not make this announcement until 28th May, which does not allow schools or families time to fully prepare and ensure everything is ready, safe and in place by 1st June.

As I have said previously, everyone wants to see children back in classrooms – once we are assured it is as safe as possible to do so. On 1st June, Executive Leaders will meet to reassess the situation, latest government announcements and information available. They will meet with Trustees and the decision reviewed. Meanwhile, schools will continue to provide the services currently in place, and school leaders will begin to prepare for any wider reopening, as and when Trustees are assured that it is the right time to do this.

We will keep you fully informed of decisions, in a timely manner and assure you that the safety of everyone in our Trust is paramount.

Once again, many thanks to you for everything that you are doing. I am sure that you will also join me in taking this opportunity to publicly thank everyone in our schools for their hard work and dedication through such turbulent and unknown times.

Yours sincerely,



Sharron Philpot

Acting CEO
Victoria Academies Trust