

2nd June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

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

In our letter dated 21st May, we said that we would update you after half term on the situation regarding the possible wider opening of schools across Victoria Academies Trust.

Over the past two weeks, the Executive Leadership Team and school leaders have been keeping up to date with latest guidance and data provided by government, scientists, unions and local authorities. We have also spoken to staff and listened to our local communities.

Our main priority is always that whatever we do, it should keep everyone in our schools as safe as we possibly can in these unknown and unprecedented times. We do not always have the answers - no one does - so we have to assess every risk and make sure we can put factors in place which reduce this risk as much as possible. Coronavirus is not going to suddenly disappear, it is something over time that we all have to adjust our lives to come to terms with, certainly for the foreseeable future.

On Monday, the Executive Leadership Team met to assess the current situation with regards to the points made in my last letter. The updates on these are as follows:

- We are working with government guidance which is rushed, changing on an almost daily basis, and often contradictory. *Over the past few weeks, guidance is consistent and is not changing on a daily basis and therefore leaders have clear guidance now which they can follow.*
- 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. *The latest scientific (SAGE) report was released on 28th May. This gives clear data on which decisions can be made. I have asked schools to make this report available to you as it is not available in full online.*
- 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 has indicated in briefings that the country are currently meeting the five key tests.*
- The government say they may not make this announcement until 29th May, which does not allow schools or families time to fully prepare and ensure everything is ready, safe and in place by 1st June. *The government have announced that schools are permitted to begin to reopen.*

As a Multi Academy Trust, the Board of Trustees are responsible for agreeing any decision. The Executive Leadership Team have been in discussion with Trustees where it was agreed that following the data and science from the independent SAGE report would be the way Victoria Academies Trust approach any wider opening.

The outcome of this meeting was that from Monday 15th June, Victoria Academies Trust would begin a slow, steady and safe phased opening to a wider number of children. This would be dependent on the school having appropriate cleaning resources and PPE available, and that the scientific data, nationally or locally did not adversely change; e.g the R rate rises above 1.

The reasons for this are set out below:

The SAGE report states clearly that delaying any wider opening until 15th June reduces the risk of exposure to a contagious classmate or catching the virus reduces by half compared to opening on 1st June. It is also clear that opening should also be dependent on local issues, and therefore should there be specific local outbreaks or national changes, this decision will immediately be reviewed.

As I said in my previous letter, we all want schools to open; for our children to return, but will only do so when we feel we have the assurance that we can make it as safe as possible. Our position is that this date and approach to reopening is 'slow, steady and safe' - allowing us to get things right - the stakes are too high to make mistakes. Each school will take an individual approach to a slow and steady wider opening, taking into account their own specific context. Your own school will be in contact in due course with the offer they will be able to make, with times, dates and plans. We should remind you that currently, it is still parental choice whether you wish your child to attend, and we fully support your decisions as each family will have their own circumstances which they have to consider.

Once again, many thanks to you for everything that you are doing, and your ongoing support through this difficult time.

Yours sincerely,



Sharron Philpot

Acting CEO
Victoria Academies Trust