

Dear Parent,

At the risk of stating the blindingly obvious, the last few months have been unique and hugely challenging for the whole school community. Governors have been working with members of staff to ensure that we discharge our responsibilities as effectively as usual despite the current circumstances.

The school's Senior Leadership Team has shared with me feedback they have received from parents on

- the initial closure of school to all except children of key workers and vulnerable pupils
- the provision of materials and support for home learning
- the phased return of Reception, Y1 and Y6 from 1st June
- the most recent communications on the wider reopening of school

Your comments have been overwhelmingly positive, and I share one representative example: 'From speaking with friends and colleagues whose children have gone back to school ... we seem to have found a much better balance between business as usual, social distancing/Covid-concerns and teaching than every other school setting that I have heard about. The teaching staff have done a fantastic job.' I echo those sentiments.

I do understand the immense frustration of some parents of pupils in Years 2-5 that their children will now not be able to return until September at the earliest. The government had initially pledged that these pupils would return for a few weeks before the summer holidays, but last week announced a change of heart. I think it would have been more sensible not to have promised this – and raised expectations among pupils and parents – in the first place.

I am also disappointed that there doesn't seem to be a coherent plan from the Department for Education to get schools functioning more fully for more pupils. The rapid setting up of Nightingale Hospitals shows what can be done with enough political will and financial support; schools need the same degree of attention and additional resources to prevent pupils falling further behind.

More worrying still is that – in the absence of a radical plan from government – unless social distancing restrictions are abolished for September, schools cannot open full time to all pupils in the new academic year. Anyone who has seen classes in action will appreciate that 30 pupils cannot be accommodated in our classrooms even if social distancing limits fall to 1m. This is not unique to us: last week, BBC News interviewed a primary school Head with 12 pupils in each 'bubble'. He noted that this number could increase to 15 if social distancing changed from 2m to 1m, still requiring him to find twice the space and twice the numbers of staff to get all children back – similar to the conclusions we have reached.

Be assured that the staff and governors are as keen as parents that all pupils return to school as quickly and safely as possible. You will have chosen Ickleford Primary School for your children for a variety of reasons, but I am sure the passion that staff have for educating and caring for pupils will have been high on the list. This shines through in all interactions I have with teachers and TAs. I'd encourage you to trust them to do the right thing for your children during this extraordinary time.

Best wishes,

Miles Maxwell,
Chair of Governors, Ickleford Primary School