

Response to 2 - PA Emails and questions June and July 2020

Dear parents:

The school finally closed down on March 20th of this year for most pupils. We have remained open every day, providing care and education for the children of key workers and for vulnerable pupils. We also had to set up and provide a system for ensuring free school meals and then vouchers which were delivered to around 50 children. In March staff had their own concerns and responsibilities and many self isolated or shielded. Some staff were also recovering from illness at home. We also had to ensure that every child was contacted weekly and children who were vulnerable or on child protection plans were communicated with more regularly. Before lockdown every child was provided with an individual education pack for home learning. We were not sure how many children we would be looking after but had around 5% in on any given day. This was higher than most schools as people were very fearful and the lockdown strategy worked.

We then provided weekly work for all our pupils via Class Dojo. After the first two weeks this became routine and I monitored the quality of work provided, this was of a high standard. Virtual learning is not really suitable for young children and I write more about this below. Communication was then established by phone with every child and family. There are around 30 children per class, a five or ten minute call would take 3 to 5 hours for one teacher. Vulnerable children were contacted more regularly.

Government guidelines and guidance changed daily for schools. At all times I have to balance the health and safety of children and staff. This is my responsibility and I am very aware of it. I wish we had a government of national unity to fight this virus. As a society we are increasingly polarised. The answers and communication I provide is the truth as I know it and is constantly being updated. There is no such thing as “the science” just various ideas and theories from people trying to do their best.

I would like to thank each and every family in our school community during this time. I have been out on the school gates every day since this pandemic started on March 20th and have managed to talk to so many of you and shared your fears and concerns for your children. Thank you for the way you have behaved, your strength and the consideration shown. It has not been easy for anyone. We have been hit hard by this disease and lost people very close to us.

I have the honour of also working for Ofsted and one of the most moving and humbling experiences of my life was being in a school with Syrian refugee children. They had seen war, atrocities and lost close family. They confirmed what I have always thought: children are amazingly resilient and love being in school with their friends and teachers. Children will be fine, do not worry and will catch up quickly. Those children who have returned have settled in straight away. Our numbers back are much greater than the national average so well done everyone. Hopefully all will be back in September.

Below are my answers to questions set, many of which have already been answered as events move so quickly these days. Happy to answer all questions received. This is in the exact order I received them. **Responses in green.** I hope you find them useful, informative and reassuring. See the rest of you in September please God.

“In times of stress, the best thing we can do for each other is to listen with our ears and our hearts and to be assured that our questions are just as important as our answers” – Fred Rogers

Sean Flood (Headteacher)

Communication

Is there a communication plan/strategy in place to communicate with parents about school reopening/no reopening in September? Might it be possible for the school set up a virtual meeting with/for the parents to share information about September school re-opening?

There are daily strategies in place to try to deal with all the changes around school reopening in September. I opened this email on Tuesday 23rd June and within a few days major changes had been announced for all parts of the UK. Using a wide network of contacts I have been planning for some weeks now on a full “normal” reopening on September 2nd. This is what I have been planning for and adapting plans for on a daily basis. In terms of communication Newsletter 1154 on Friday 26th June has all the details about the transition plans and how children will be coming in until the end of term. Also outlines current plans for September.

We will continue to send texts, film clips will be going on our website, virtual meetings until the end of term with classes, weekly work and communication via class Dojo and weekly phone calls from staff enquiring after children’s health and welfare. These will all continue until the end of term.

Plan B - School-led Homeschooling

If school cannot be re-opened to all children at the beginning of September, how will the school deliver education to all their children?

I am hoping to reopen to all children in September and am planning for that.

Can the school explain and would the school consider more structured online teaching?

We are all learning lessons from lockdown and will be continuing with online learning even after a full return. Online learning of this nature is not appropriate for all families so we have built in flexibility. This allows parents to be creative and design a curriculum with built in flexibility to suit their own individual needs and responsibilities. Please be aware these are primary school age children and everyone agrees that learning in school is far better.

If money is an issue, maybe the PA is able to contribute towards the purchase of books that can be easily distributed to all families or those who cannot access online technology.

Always happy to take or generate money to help others and am all ears at anytime. We have provided books to a wide range of pupils.

Other state primary schools in Hackney have been adapting well to home learning and have provided alternative online work for the children, such as Google classroom. This has allowed teachers to engage in regular feedback on the work submitted by the children. In addition, when technology has been an issue, printed material has been delivered to the children (or placed outside the school for families to collect), ensuring very little disruption to the learning.

I will never comment on what ‘other’ schools do. I equally wish every school both state and private best wishes in these times. Every school has to do what they can. I attended an online Google Meets meeting on Wednesday with 56 other heads and school leaders present. I have been monitoring this closely since March 20th. Various Whats App groups have circulated all sorts of messages about what ‘other’ schools are doing. All schools I am aware of have done their very best and coped in really challenging times so good luck to them. The majority have also remained open for key workers and vulnerable pupils. We have provided high quality work every week for all pupils to complete. I know it is high quality because I check it. It is not easy to keep young children on task and especially during a

pandemic. I am aware of one school that did a presentation to us of what they have been doing since after the Easter break. It looked really interesting. I have been told of other schools doing things and when I have checked it is quite simply not the case. Teachers unions told all teachers not to do online teaching and Zoom was blocked until recently. As lockdown has continued things have changed. We now have Google Classrooms and Google Meets as well as Class Dojo and other online platforms. Year 5 and 6 have now all and Webinars with more to follow and I am sure we will continue using new technologies. We have provided printed materials and also delivered these to many families from Day 1 and even provided ink cartridges. As a one form entry school we did much better than some 'other schools' and have picked up valuable tips from 'other' schools. I always like to learn from best practice.

If homeschooling has to continue, can OLSJ support parents more actively in replicating aspects of normal school life (e.g. being on time, assemblies, lessons, good behaviour, checking in at a particular time in the morning and someone checking that a pupil is there at a particular time, agreeing a minimum amount of teaching time etc.)?

I hope home schooling as stated here does not have to take place remotely. Young children spend far too much time online already. Always happy to help with being on time (I am never late) and good behaviour and we hope to carry this on in school.

Will teachers engage more frequently and actively with pupils and parents, with feedback regarding their child's work and progress?

We will continue to provide feedback and support to parents and pupils on their work as the year progresses.

Continuity & Routine

Year 6: How will key aspects of Yr 6 (CAT, Secondary School choices, SATs, and SATs preparation) be delivered? These children in particular would benefit from continuity and parents would like to tell their children before the summer term ends who their teacher will be. The request to retain the current class teacher has come from parents in almost all year groups, and I do know the children are usually introduced to their new teacher during the last week or 2 of the academic school year.

Good question and all will be revealed July 3rd to parents. Year 6 transition work has continued since June 23rd and the whole class are in the last week and we have had regular contact with many secondary schools. The new Year 6 class will continue to receive an outstanding Year 6 curriculum in the next academic year.

Year 3: Might the school be able to work with/partner with the parish and offer in-house first communion classes for year 3, whereby lessening exposure to others outside the school community.

Happy to discuss with Fr Derek and Pete as we work closely together at all times.

What are the school's plans regarding children who need learning support? How are you planning to provide SLT, for example, and ensure these children are not left behind?

We have just this week bought in lots extra SLT (Speech and Language Therapy) time and are in discussion with Hackney as to how this will be provided. They are planning as well.

What resources and support is the school putting into place to help the children transition to the new year level and new teacher? And to transition back into the school environment.

All children are coming back for half a day before the end of term. The three year groups that have come back so far have mostly taken about 5 seconds to get back into routines. I have said for years children are amazingly 'resilient'. See what I write elsewhere. They just need to be back in school.

Would the school consider their last teacher (before lockdown) taking them up to the next year. Many parents feel that this would assist with the settling in and also help identify the gaps in learning that would have developed after six months out of formal education.

I have considered many things and all will be revealed July 3rd to parents.

Will there be more teacher assistants in class to help students struggling?

My first priority is to get all staff back to school first including all of those shielding and self isolating. I will know more by the end of term and will review this.

Can the school tell us whether they will open full time or part time? Do you have preferences and can you explain this? Will there be any changes to normal routine?

Full time is my preference. Changes to normal routines will be in place such as hand washing, seating arrangements etc. Other aspects to change are assemblies, singing, sports, lunches, play times. All of these need to be considered and arranged.

If school isn't open to all classes, how can school ensure that every child has an I-pad or computer (on loan, second hand, lent from the school...)?

We have already provided what we can and are looking at help from government, charities etc. My thanks to those who have quietly helped already.

If school does re-open, will there be the provision of breakfast club, after school club, sports, arts clubs, etc.?

Not immediately but hopefully will continue shortly. Our current providers of after school care (Let Me Play) are pulling out they informed me this week. So a changing picture.

Health+Safety Concerns:

What health and safety procedures will be in place i.e. temperature checking on arrival?

We have two temperature remote guns that we do use if needed but do not wish to scare little ones coming in right away. We have all the best PPE equipment and medical supplies available. Our Health and Safety Risk Assessment and Policy for Covid 19 is on our website.

What does cleaning/'deep-cleaning' at OLSJ mean? Could you explain?

As one of the first schools to be hit by Covid19 we did one of the early deep cleans. It basically involves fumigation and smoke type bombs. As soon as school is open and children return the same second it is no longer effective. In our case we have bought in extra cleaning time and now have five cleaners on rota including one in the morning and one going around during most of the day. That is a lot for a school our size.

If a family needs to self-isolate, will the child be marked down/penalised for being absent - i.e. count against their attendance record. Also will the school support those families with home learning?

No penalties for reported absence. Basic message is keep us informed. We will continue to support all we can.

Update: N.B. Newspapers on Sunday 28th June is now saying this will change.

PM is saying it will be compulsory to attend but not yet confirmed.

Will playtime/lunchtime be staggered?

Yes.

Other:

How will we purchase any uniform items, if needed?

Order forms are online and you can arrange collection. Uniforms have been ordered this week.

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Below are questions which I thought the answers are either out of the hands of our school (be it the Learning Trust or the government/DfE) or don't yet exist. Please feel free to respond if I am incorrect.

Will school days be longer to make up missed education?

There may be moves for extra Summer schools etc. Anything else unlikely as it involves changes in the law and contracts apart from heads and deputies. Teachers have to be available for 1,265 hours per year and 195 days. Heads and deputies 365 and 8,544 hours of the year. This is all covered by employment law.

If a vaccine is approved and rolled out, will vaccination be mandatory to attend the school and will a vaccination certificate be required (staff included) and will you consider enforcing exclusion for unvaccinated children/staff members?

I do not know.

While we already have term dates for 2020/2021; is there any idea if/how those dates will change?

I hope they will not. I do not know.

Has there been any thought of shortening the summer holidays and starting school earlier than September?

See answer above about contracts and the law etc.

This question is not at all meant to be insensitive: Could you please provide some information on how and when a new Chair of Governors will be elected?

A new Chair of governors will be elected at the first meeting in the Autumn term and will then be in post as Chair for the next 2 years. This takes place in October. Every governor can vote. Procedures are online. There will be a new Chair this year as our previous Chair Mr Derek Vitali died of Covid19 on May 11th of this year - RIP.

Dear parents / PA:

Below is my response to the second set of questions sent by a group of the PA. My replies are in green. When I received this I was awaiting the latest government guidance on the reopening of schools. It came on Thursday 2nd of July and consisted of 40 further pages. I post a link below if you wish to read it all. I have read it at some length.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak/what-parents-and-carers-need-to-know-about-early-years-providers-schools-and-colleges-in-the-autumn-term>

The guidance is interesting with passages such as: 'For children old enough, they should also be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff and their peers where possible. This will not be possible for the youngest children and some children with complex needs and it is not feasible in some schools where space does not allow'. And 'Schools should make small adaptations to the classroom to support distancing where possible.' And also 'Groups should be kept apart, meaning that schools should avoid large gatherings such as assemblies or collective worship with more than one group.' I quote the guidance as it is written without comment. There are 40 pages similar.

I am going ahead, as I wrote previously of a reopening in September with lots of adaptations and changes to routines.. (See previous response and guidance). This second set asks me to speculate on the unknown of a 'second CV-19 peak'. Bob Dylan once wrote "It's hard to speculate what tomorrow may bring".

We have contingency plans in place and they are constantly reviewed and I will not spin or bluster about what we can and cannot achieve. We will however always strive to do our best. There are not many questions but rather people's experiences during lockdown.

A leading newspaper reported yesterday: 'Headteachers told how some pupils returned to school last month looking shell-shocked and wary, with shoulders slumped and eyes down, struggling to socialise, with teachers even having to clean the teeth of some youngsters'. This is very sad to read. However, I can only describe our own experience here which is of children being thrilled to be back and mostly skipping happily in to school. They settle back in minutes to new routines and are happy young children again. Also it is important to note many will indeed have been away since March 20th. In terms of school days this is roughly 58 days missed. One day missing is not good but we can quickly ensure that they catch up with their learning. I am optimistic about young children's resilience. All educational research I have seen bears this out too. Please read my other responses too and try not to be afraid to send your children back to school. They want to be with their teachers and friends and we also want them back very much.

SECOND EMAIL RECEIVED FROM PA

Dear Sean Flood and Aoife O'Grady

This is writing on behalf of the PA asis away. Many thanks from the PA for replying to each of the parents concerns so extensively! The PA would very kindly like to ask for clarification on one point before the Q&A is sent out to everyone.

Parents would like more clarification on what will happen at OLSJ, should there be second CV-19 peak in October/ November (as quite a few scientists predict) and consequently a second lockdown. (Or should current guidance change again) If we go into lockdown again, will there be a remote learning provision again and what will this look like?

We have contingency plans in place and these are constantly reviewed along with Risk assessments. We will have similar remote learning provision in place and new provision as well. I stress for young children remote learning is not suitable for more than short periods of time. Nothing can replace the interaction with teachers and classroom.

By the start of the summer holidays, most of our children won't have been at school for 18 weeks. These were the most common schooling & 'homeschooling' scenarios described to us:

- Some Keyworker children and vulnerable children were offered a place in school. While schools couldn't follow normal routine and the national curriculum either, they received a basic education, we assume.
- I really want to clarify this point as it is misinformation. **ALL** keyworker children and vulnerable children were offered a place in this school from Day 1. It goes on to state: 'they received a basic education, we assume'. This is not correct. They in fact received a very varied education and not basic at all. I am not sure where this assumption came from. We had music, sports and art classes as well as core subjects in mixed age classes and it could not be described as 'basic'. I only wish more pupils could have benefitted from this.
- One parent has become a [more a less] FT home educator with a relatively strict timetable and doing most or all work set by school. This model had a lot of limitations, e.g. if there is more than one child in EY, KS1 or KS2.
- It is not easy to educate ones own children at any time I agree.
- Children do little work, in particular where parents are working, have other responsibilities or were ill. Over the course of the last few weeks, we heard increasingly that our children's appetite for doing schoolwork has decreased without their beloved social environment, without their teachers and without lessons.
- I agree children need to be in school as much as possible.

- Some parents now have started to hire extra tutors, as they fear their children's education has suffered a great deal already and as, come the autumn, they expect to be under a lot of pressure economically while schools might well have to be closed again.
- Tutors can be useful for some subjects but not others and are very expensive for most families. I do fear very much for the economic pressures families will be under in the months and years ahead. I fully recognise this and know many people really struggling. We have done all we can to support all families during this time. One word of caution for those who can afford private tutors we are asked to warn parents of the safeguarding risks involved. I received this really helpful guide from Redbridge on Monday of this week and would advise parents to consider its contents. On our website under Parents Info – Home Tutoring July 2020. Please have a look.

Given the nature of the virus and of our government, we are very concerned. The learning outcomes in the quite typical scenarios listed above have had many nuances and differ greatly. What's clear is that many children have been left behind. Everyone, first and foremost the children, miss schooling, routine and structured teaching and learning in a group. Come September and another lockdown, parents want to make sure that there is more continuity in the education of their children. However, if we are left to our own devices, this only will mean that the gaps will widen. We crave for some clarity and good planning and don't know who to turn to apart from school

If would be great if you can bear answering this last point.

I hope my detailed responses in the last two emails have provided clarity and reassurance. We will continue to do our very best to support families and children in our community. Kind regards,

..... on behalf of the OLSJ PA

Mark Twain suffered more than most in his life and somehow retained his genius and sense of humour. He also said so many wise things. In my office I have on the walls the quote: 'Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see'.

In times like these I also often turn to one of his other legendary sayings:

'I've had a lot of worries in my life, most of which never happened'.

Let us be kind and supportive to one another and optimistic of better days ahead.

Yours,

Sean Flood Headteacher