



The Oak-Tree Group of Schools

Head Office: 6-8 Albion Hill, Loughton, Essex IG10 4RA

Tel: 020 8508 3109

Twitter: [@oaktreeschools](https://twitter.com/oaktreeschools)

Email: info@oaktreeschools.co.uk

Website: www.oaktreeschools.co.uk

Group Managing Principal

Mr Matthew Hagger B.A. (Hons), M.Ed., PGCE

26 August 2020

Dear Parents

Re: September 2020 Restart

I hope that you and your families are well and that you have been able to get something of a break over the summer, even if just a break from normal routines. In the latest instalment of what have become necessarily long 'Corona epics' since March 2020, I am pleased to be able to write to outline some of our procedures for next week's return to school in light of the latest Covid-19 government guidelines.

Barring any late drama over the next few days, we are planning for all pupils to return to school on Thursday 3 September.

Please read through this letter carefully as there is a large amount of information that will affect you and your child. Each school's Head will write tomorrow with more specific details about the daily routines that will need to change to accommodate the return of all children on site and the two letters should be read together.

Latest Guidelines

As predicted, the government's guidelines, as published by the Department for Education, have been updated several times over the summer. The latest version that is available to view via the link <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>. These are worth reading as they contain explanations and some rationale behind many of the changes outlined here.

Chief Medical Officers

On Sunday, the UK Chief Medical Officers released a joint statement through the Department of Health and Social Care. This is available to view via the link <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-from-the-uk-chief-medical-officers-on-schools-and-childcare-reopening>.

The statement presents the balance of risks to achieve the best course of action for children with regard to schools fully reopening next week. The Chief Medical Officers state that there is clear evidence of a very low rate of severe disease in children of primary and secondary school ages compared to adults, even if they catch Covid-19, and conclude that there is an exceptionally small risk of fatalities from Covid-19 for these age groups.

They also state that data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) suggests that teachers are not at increased risk of Covid-19 compared to the general working-age population. ONS data identifies teaching as a lower risk profession (no profession is zero risk). International data supports this.

Risk Assessment

I have attached with this letter our detailed Risk Assessment that has been updated over the summer by our Group Operations and Health & Safety Manager, Mike Isbell, and our senior teams. This includes the latest updates to the guidelines and is a 'live' document that will continue to be updated daily for use by our staff. You will see that we have tried to consider as many risks as possible so that we can find solutions to minimise the risk to children, staff and parents.



Braeside School

130 High Road, Buckhurst Hill
Essex IG9 5SD
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Company no: 0783067



Coopersale Hall School

Flux's Lane, Epping
Essex CM16 7PE
01992 577133

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Company no: 3524644



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North Chingford E4 7BA
020 8529 4307

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Effective Infection Protection and Control/Hygiene

The Department for Education has advised schools to take important actions to help prevent the spread of the virus. The spread of Coronavirus involves dealing with direct transmission (for instance, when in close contact with those sneezing and coughing) and indirect transmission (via touching contaminated surfaces).

The following is the set of actions that the government has directed schools to take in the updated guidelines:

Prevention

1. Minimising contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have Coronavirus symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school.
2. Clean hands thoroughly more often than usual
3. Ensure good respiratory hygiene by promoting the 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach.
4. Introduce enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and Milton.
5. Minimise contact between individuals and maintain social distancing wherever possible.
6. Where necessary, wear personal protective equipment in specific circumstances.

Response to any infection:

7. Engage with the NHS Test and Trace process.
8. Manage confirmed cases of Coronavirus amongst the school community.
9. Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice.

Hygiene

We have a large number of anti-viral/bacterial gel dispensers throughout our sites and we will continue to encourage all children, staff and visitors to use them frequently throughout the day. Equally, all toilets have sufficient hand basins and soap for use.

All children will be reminded about the importance of good hygiene practices in our form times or assemblies and to wash their hands for 20 seconds with running water and soap before drying them thoroughly. This will be reinforced through the signage around the sites. All children will wash their hands before eating and will be encouraged to do so when entering the buildings.

Our classrooms all have anti-viral/bacterial surface sprays and wipes for use by staff throughout the day.

Our maintenance teams will continue to clean frequently touched surfaces during the day using detergents, computer/iPad wipes and Milton sterilising cleaner. Our cleaning teams will continue to provide a nightly 'deep clean' every evening of all hard surfaces using Milton sterilising cleaner.

Temperature Checks and Medication

Public Health England is clear that routinely taking the temperature of pupils is no longer recommended as this is an unreliable method for identifying Coronavirus. We will not take the children's temperatures unless we suspect that a pupil has symptoms. Each school has several contactless digital infrared thermometers on standby.

Do not send children to school with a temperature, consistent cough or any other sickness. Anybody who has a temperature of 37.8 degrees or higher will be sent home. Do not try to mask a high temperature with Calpol or any other medicine.

Please make sure that your child has all normal medication when school restarts and consider that the supply we may have had previously could be out of date.



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Minimising Contact Between Individuals

Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission of Coronavirus. We are working to minimise contacts and mixing while delivering a broad and balanced curriculum.

The guidelines state that the overarching principle to apply is to reduce the number of contacts between children and staff. This can be achieved through keeping groups separate (in 'bubbles') and through maintaining distance between individuals. These are not alternative options and both measures will help, but the balance between them will change depending on:

- the children's ability to distance
- the layout of the school
- the feasibility of keeping distinct groups separate while offering a broad curriculum (especially at secondary)

For younger children the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older children it will be on distancing. Children who are old enough will be supported to maintain distance and to not touch staff where possible.

'Bubbles'

Consistent groups reduce the risk of transmission by limiting the number of pupils and staff in contact with each other to only those within the group. We used them in the Summer Term in recognition that children, and especially the youngest children, cannot always socially distance from staff or from each other.

However, the Department for Education now recognises that the use of much smaller groups restricts the normal operation of schools and presents both educational and logistical challenges including the cleaning and use of shared spaces such as playgrounds, dining halls and toilets, and the provision of specialist teaching.

Whilst maintaining consistent groups remains important, given the decrease in the prevalence of Coronavirus and the resumption of the full range of curriculum subjects, schools have been told to change the emphasis on bubbles within their system of controls and to increase the size of these groups.

Although some state schools will place entire year groups of hundreds in one bubble, we are working to achieve a balance that will allow us to maintain safety whilst being able to organise break/lunch times and the use of shared teaching spaces such as in Science or Computing. Our year groups are relatively small and so we feel we can bring some together safely – not to be taught in lessons, but for timings of lunches, break times etc. Our youngest children will not be able to maintain social distancing, and it is acceptable within the guidelines for them not to distance within their group.

Bubbles will be determined by the number of children, size of the school, layout of the site and timetabling practicalities for specialist subjects. For this reason, our schools will all be slightly different. Our bubbles will not be too large in order to reduce the number of people who could be asked to isolate should someone in a group become ill with Coronavirus. Whatever the size of the group, we will aim to keep bubbles apart from other groups where possible.

We will let you know which year groups will be together in bubbles in tomorrow's Head's letters. For all the logistical reasons above, these will not be able to be changed.

The Department for Education advises that teachers and other staff can operate across different classes and year groups in order to facilitate the delivery of the school timetable. Where staff need to move between classes and year groups, they will try to keep their distance from pupils and other staff as much as they can. Again, the government recognises that this is not likely to be possible with younger children.



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Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Face Masks

Pupils

The Prime Minister changed his stance on face masks yesterday evening and announced that older pupils from Year 7 upwards in secondary schools may wear masks in communal areas and where social distancing cannot be safely managed. The government's sudden change in policy follows a new statement from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 21 August 2020: <https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/q-a-children-and-masks-related-to-covid-19>.

This morning, the Department for Education released a short update about face coverings in schools: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-in-education/face-coverings-in-education>.

We do not necessarily see the need for face masks in schools by our older pupils as there are obvious drawbacks surrounding the safe and hygienic use, storage and disposal of masks as well as communication with staff. However, although we do not recommend that pupils wear them at this stage, we do recognise that there may be some seniors at Braeside and Normanhurst who feel more comfortable wearing a face mask whilst on site due to their particular circumstances. **They are not mandatory at this stage as we are not in an area currently in local lockdown.** Of course, this might change over the coming months depending on how the government feels at the time.

Face masks are not appropriate for younger children below the age of 11 at any school, and are still not recommended for use by the government or Public Health England.

Please note the following about the use of face masks by senior pupils at Braeside and Normanhurst that must be adhered to if they are to be worn in school:

- they must bring a container (eg a 'zip lock' food bag) with them each day in which to place the mask safely during lunchtimes, PE/Music lessons and any other occasion when they are not able to wear it.
- they must not touch the front of their mask, including putting it on, during use or when removing it.
- they must wash or sanitise their hands before touching the mask and after removing it.
- the mask must go up to the bridge of the nose and all the way under the chin, with any loops or ties tightened so that it fits snugly over the face.
- they must avoid wearing it loosely on the neck or forehead.
- they must avoid taking it off and putting it on a lot in quick succession.
- they must change the mask if it becomes damp, dirty or damaged.
- they must bring their own supply of masks with a sufficient quantity of spares for use throughout the day, bearing in mind the timetabled lessons, lunch/break times, weather and any extra-curricular activities.
- they must dispose of the mask safely, if required to during the day, in a separate bag or container.

Our staff are not health experts and cannot take responsibility for the optional use of face masks by some pupils or the day-to-day wearing and safe storage of them, so it will be up to the pupils themselves to follow the above procedures.

If your child intends to wear a face mask in school next week then please email the School Office before the start of term on Thursday 3 September to let us know and to confirm that you have spent some time with him/her to make sure they are aware of the above procedures and do not inadvertently increase the risk of transmission.

The following sites may be of use:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>
- <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/when-and-how-to-use-masks>



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Parents

The safety of our children and staff is of the utmost importance, and any decisions we take are driven by our aim to minimise the risks in accordance with our comprehensive Risk Assessment.

All parents and visitors who have a particular reason to enter our buildings (see 'parents' section below) must wear appropriate face masks from Thursday 3 September 2020 until further notice.

Just as it is the law in England that we must wear a face covering in indoor settings such as shops, supermarkets, banks, hair salons, libraries and churches, we feel that it is appropriate to ask all non-staff adults entering our buildings to do the same. Please follow the same procedures as above when wearing masks. At this stage, it will not be necessary to wear a face mask outside the buildings when on site, but of course you are welcome to do so. Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Staff

Face masks will be optional for use by staff. The government guidelines currently state that schools should not require staff to wear face coverings, even if they are not always able to maintain a distance of 2 metres from others. Although we will not be requiring them to use face masks, it will be their choice to wear their own during the day if they are able to manage them effectively in line with the procedures above and feel safer doing so. Some staff will be returning to school for the first time since March due to particular shielding needs, and will have particular medical conditions to consider.

We do have a small stock of emergency protective gloves, face shields and face masks for staff to use if PPE is required during the day for a small number of cases including:

- for younger children whose care routinely already involves the use of PPE due to their intimate care needs.
- if a child becomes unwell with symptoms of Coronavirus while at school and needs direct personal care and supervision by a member of staff until they can return home.

Measures within the classroom

Maintaining a distance between people whilst inside and reducing the amount of time they are in face-to-face contact lowers the risk of transmission. It is strong public health advice that staff in secondary schools maintain distance from their pupils, staying at the front of the class, and away from their colleagues where possible.

In the classroom, our staff will try to maintain appropriate distancing from the children, in particular avoiding close face-to-face contact and minimising time spent within 1 metre of anyone. The guidelines state that schools doing this where they can, and even doing this for some of the time, will help to slow the spread of Coronavirus.

We have already made small adaptations to the classrooms to support distancing where possible. These include seating pupils side-by-side and facing forwards, rather than face-to-face or side on, and also moving unnecessary furniture out of rooms to make more space.

All pupils in Years 5 to 11 should bring their own stationery to school as usual in a plain named pencil case without any attachments. Younger children will be provided with a set that will be 'theirs' for use and kept separately. Children should not bring to school any soft toys, key rings or unnecessary items.

Our timetabling keeps movement around the school site to a minimum. While passing briefly in the corridor or playground is considered low risk, we have worked to avoid creating busy corridors, entrances and exits. Break times and lunch times will continue to be staggered.



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Practicalities on Site

We will continue to designate certain entrances for set groups of children, and the Head's letter tomorrow will provide more details. As usual, please bear with us over the first few days of term as everything will be new for us all. Our sign boards are being updated to help direct you to the correct places.

Each school has a designated isolation room that will be used by anybody showing any symptoms during the day. This will be thoroughly disinfected after use.

In some sites we will operate one way systems around the buildings to ease the flow and minimise contact. We will operate a 'keep left' system inside the buildings and around the site, eg in corridors and on staircases, pathways etc. Please keep to this when passing others if you are on site.

Coronavirus Testing

Once schools are open again, staff and children in all settings will be eligible for testing if they become ill with Coronavirus symptoms, as will members of their household. This will enable children to get back school and their parents to get back to work, if the test proves to be negative. A positive test will ensure rapid action to protect their classmates and staff.

Confirmed Cases of Coronavirus at School

If a child, or staff member develops symptoms compatible with Coronavirus:

1. They will be sent home immediately, waiting in our isolation area until picked up.
2. They will need to be tested as above.
3. They will be advised to self-isolate for 7 days, with any household members self-isolating for 14 days.

If the test is positive, the rest of their class/bubble will be sent home and advised to self-isolate for 14 days. The other household members of that wider class/group will not need to self-isolate unless living with a member of the class/group who subsequently tests positive.

As part of the national test and trace programme, if other cases are detected within the child's class/bubble or in the rest of the school, Public Health England's local Health Protection Teams will conduct a 'rapid' investigation and will advise us about the most appropriate action to take.

Morning Arrival

We are trying to restart as many before and after school clubs as possible, within the limits of the updated government guidelines. The government has stated that schools should consider resuming any breakfast and after-school provision, where possible, from the start of the Autumn Term.

Breakfast Club will run from 7.30am in all schools. As we will need to organise appropriate social distancing it is crucial that we know who will be coming each morning.

Please email the School Office if you require this additional breakfast service.

Children who do not attend Breakfast Club should arrive any time between **8.15am and 8.40am** to stagger the morning arrival. They should make their way directly to their classrooms and parents must not stay on site. Our staff will not have morning briefings and will be available to greet the children from 8.15am. They will be given starter activities and registration will be taken at 8.45am.

These are temporary measures that will be reviewed continuously over the coming weeks/months and we aim to revert to our normal procedures at whatever time the conditions allow.



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After School Provision

The Head's letter tomorrow will include finishing times for each year group. Please do not arrive on site more than 5 minutes before your child is due to be handed over at the end of school as we look to minimise large gatherings.

The updated guidelines state that schools should carefully consider how to make their extra-curricular provision work alongside their wider protective measures, including keeping children within their year groups or bubbles where possible. If it is not possible to maintain the same bubbles that are used during the school day then schools should use small, consistent groups.

As I know you will appreciate, the logistics of organising multiple clubs for different age groups across bubbles in many different locations is particularly challenging. However, we recognise that our extra-curricular programmes provide excellent opportunities for the children and support our working parents. Therefore, we are aiming for the vast majority to restart from **Monday 7 September**.

Some will need more adjustments than others, including the possible reduction of numbers through the provision of additional spaces and staff. Tomorrow's Head's letter will detail such arrangements where relevant.

Our staff will provide a late 'Teatime/After School Club' until 6pm as usual. As we will need to organise appropriate social distancing it is crucial that we know who will be coming each afternoon. **Please email the School Office if you require this additional after school service.**

Educational Visits

Although the government guidelines state that schools can resume non-overnight domestic educational visits, we will not be doing so until at least after the October half term. We feel that our staff and children have enough to contend with keeping to the Covid-19 procedures on site and so will plan for more trips and visits later in the academic year. Mike Isbell, our Group Operations and Health & Safety Manager, will oversee the risk assessments for all trips across the Group when they restart whilst adjustments are still being made.

We are still liaising regularly with the travel company about the proposed Normanhurst senior trips abroad over the October half term and we will come back to you in due course once the position becomes clear.

Curriculum

Although there may need to be some minor adjustments to our provision where required by the guidelines, we are planning to provide the full range of curriculum subjects to all pupils. We will continue to use the outdoor space wherever possible.

PE

Contact sports are not permitted, so the PE teams have developed alternative activities where required. There will be no swimming, where applicable, for the first half of the Autumn Term. This has been requested by the pools we use as they not be able to clean changing areas/toilets sufficiently in between use by different groups. We plan to restart after the October half term but, as with everything else, this will be depending on the conditions at the time.

Music

Pupils will not be able to share musical instruments, so our music teachers are planning for a variety of alternative musical activities. The playing of instruments and singing will take place side-by-side and not face-to-face.



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Parents/Carers on Site

We will continue to minimise large gatherings and additional adults on site until conditions allow us to return to normal. Although we normally take pride in our open door policies and quick access to staff, I know you will appreciate that this will not be possible at the moment.

Therefore, while we look to reduce the number of people on site in order to help minimise the spread of Coronavirus and keep the children and staff safe, I would ask that you respect the following:

- No parent/carers should enter any of the buildings unless for a specific reason, such as for a pre-arranged appointment or to take medication to the School Office.
- Parents/carers must not gather on site at the start or end of the day around the dropping off/picking up times.
- If your child needs to be accompanied to one of our buildings then only one parent/carers should attend. Your child should come into school and you should leave straight away.
- The School Office will operate on a '1 in, 1 out' basis, with parents/carers invited to queue at 2m intervals as marked. Please keep visits in person to the School Office to an absolute minimum and either call or email as alternatives.
- All parents and visitors who need to enter our buildings must wear a face mask at all times as outlined above.

We will, of course, revert to our normal friendly welcome for parents/carers as soon as we can, but for now thank you in advance for your understanding. Please do not take offence if one of our team gently reminds you to move away from the buildings/site if you inadvertently get caught up in the post-summer 'catch up' over the first few days. We will always be acting in the best interests of the entire school community.

We appreciate that you may want to see your child's new classroom, so our teachers will email you some photographs by the end of next week when the rooms are set up and ready for the children. We will be able to welcome you back into our buildings as the guidelines become more relaxed, hopefully over the coming weeks and months.

Mrs Hewitt, our Group Bursar, wrote on Friday about the payment of fees at the start of term in light of trying to reduce additional adults on our sites. The easiest method will be to make an electronic payment either through your own banking app/website or through our secure Group website. We also take credit cards online or by telephone to Head Office. Cheques can be dropped into the school or sent in the post, but our office teams will not be able to count cash at this time. If you have cash that you would like to part with for the fees then please bring it to Head Office in Loughton and let Mrs Hewitt know in advance when you plan to come via shewitt@oaktreeschools.co.uk.

Peripatetic Music Lessons

Individual instrumental lessons with our visiting peripatetic teachers will be able to restart from the second week of term. By their very nature, these lessons rely on close contact with the children and so our teams will operate in accordance with the following guidelines:

- where possible, all children will use their own instruments that will be opened and packed away safely in the room where they are used.
- shared instruments, such as pianos and drums, will be cleaned with anti-viral/bacterial cleaners in between use.
- most lessons, will take place with a retractable plastic screen between the teacher and children.
- Singing lessons will take place with the teacher and children side-by-side and not face-to-face.



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Essex IG9 5SD
020 8504 1133

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Company no: 0783067



Coopersale Hall School

Flux's Lane, Epping
Essex CM16 7PE
01992 577133

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Normanhurst School

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The Oak-Tree Group of Schools

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Company no: 03033574

Directors:

Mr M Hagger B.A. (Hons), M.Ed., PGCE
Mr N Hagger M.A. (Oxon)
Mrs A Hagger Cert.Ed.

Principals:

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Group Bursar:

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Lunches

Break and lunch times will be staggered so that children are not moving around school at the same time. As there will continue to be a reduced number of children to a table when eating lunch, we have asked Chartwells, who provide the catering service, to reduce the hot menu and provide a larger choice of filled rolls and sandwiches. This will enable us to move children through the lunch service faster.

Queuing at the canteen will be appropriately socially distanced and at times we may treat the children to picnics outside or in their classrooms if we feel that there are too many people in the School Hall.

Uniform

All pupils will need to wear normal full school uniform, including blazer and tie where relevant, as outlined in our uniform lists. The updated government guidelines encourage all schools to return to their usual uniform policies in the Autumn Term and state that uniforms do not need to be cleaned any more often than usual, nor do they need to be cleaned using methods that are different from normal.

Junior children can return in either summer or winter uniform. Winter uniform, where applicable, will be in place from Monday 2 November until the start of the Summer Term.

Please bear with Forest Casualwear, as they reported yesterday that more families than usual have left the purchasing of new uniform to the last few days of the holiday and so they are struggling to cope with demand. Due to the need to socially-distance, the team is working solely online through the website <https://forestcasualwear.co.uk/>. The shop is only open for collections and there is a reduced number of staff completing orders.

If you are unable to buy any new uniform for next week's restart then children can return temporarily in their PE kits. If your child is joining us for the first time and you do not have a PE kit either then please contact the School Office directly so that we can discuss the interim measures that we may be able to put into place.

As happened from 1 June 2020, in order to minimise the changing of clothes during the school day, all children should come to school in their full PE kit on the days they have PE. We will review this weekly and will come back to you with advance notice if we need to make any changes due to inclement weather or activities undertaken.

Events

As we will be avoiding all large gatherings and limiting parental visits to site, we will not be able to run any of the normal events that take place during the first half of the Autumn Term. This includes whole school assemblies/collective worship with more than one group and any performances.

There are normally a number of parent events and meetings during the Autumn Term, including workshops, coffee mornings and open events. Although they may not be able to go ahead in their current guise, we are working to introduce alternative formats and will write again separately in due course.

Attendance

The Department for Education is strongly encouraging all children to return to school, unless they are self-isolating due to possible exposure to the Coronavirus. Our teachers will not be able to teach effectively a full class of children at the same time as providing remote learning for any pupil who is absent. Instead, they will aim to send home the materials and lesson plans when time allows during the day. Please let your child's class/form teacher and Head know if your child is feeling anxious about returning due to the Coronavirus so that we can support him/her effectively.



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Quarantining

There has been much media attention recently about the government's sudden quarantining measures put into place for various countries such as Spain, France, Croatia and Austria while travellers are still abroad. Anybody who returned from one of the countries taken off the government's 'travel corridor' list any time after Wednesday 19 August must complete the 14-day self-isolation quarantine in line with the updated law. Full details are available through the link <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors#countries-and-territories-with-no-self-isolation-requirement-on-arrival-in-england>. Do not send your child to school if he/she should be quarantining.


I am very grateful to have an excellent team across the Oak-Tree Group that has been working hard to ensure that the schools are ready for next week's restart in line with the updated government guidelines. My own 'Cobra' committee consists of the Head Office team including our Group Education Principal Mrs Osborn, Bursar Mrs Hewitt and Group Operations and Health & Safety Manager Mike Isbell, and the school Heads and Deputies Mrs Belej, Miss Barnard, Mrs Moon, Mrs Job, Miss Leeks, Mrs Copeman, Mr Clair and Miss Dee. Please be assured that we are doing everything we can to make sure that we are ready to receive children back into school and that we operate as safely as possible for the children and staff.

All of the measures above will be kept under continual review throughout the first half of term and we will respond to any additional guidelines that are introduced. As ever, we are in the hands of the Department for Education and, of course, all of the above planning will change if the government decides that the 'R' number increases and stricter measures are required. At least we know now that we can successfully run the majority of our education remotely.

Each Head will write (a shorter letter!) tomorrow with specific details about changes to the daily routines. In the meantime, I hope you have a lovely final few days with your children and I look forward to seeing you again next week.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely



Matthew Hagger
Group Managing Principal



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