

15th May 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Re: Update 7 from Aurora

I sincerely hope that you and your loved ones are keeping safe and well. I promised to write to you again as and when the country had heard further announcements from the Prime Minister regarding the wider reopening of schools. As you will no doubt be aware, the Government's plan is for schools to begin to reopen more widely for children in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 as well as for some face-to-face time in school for Years 10 and 12. The current childcare provision for children of Keyworkers and for some groups of vulnerable children will continue as it does currently.

At the outset of this latest update, I will reiterate that we understand the concerns that you will have about your child(ren) during this period of national crisis. Equally, I will also repeat a message I have stated previously: ensuring the health, safety and well-being of all children and staff will be our primary consideration before any Aurora school can even begin to take in more children.

It is quite clear that some of the things that the Prime Minister *actually* said (which subsequently were reinforced in the Government's *Roadmap* and guidance documents – links to those documents are at the end of my letter, for your reference) have been misreported in the press and on social media. There seems to be a common belief that all schools have been instructed to reopen more widely on the 1st June. This is incorrect for two reasons:

- The 1st June was cited as the *very earliest date* by which schools *might be able* to open
- Any wider reopening of schools is dependent upon the Government's *5 Key Tests* being satisfied. At present these have not been satisfied and, until they are, any prospect of any return for more children, outside of those attending for the current childcare provision, is completely hypothetical

It is also important to note that the Government's plans are not mandatory at present; instead, they are recommended. That means that the Government's 'ambitions' are not set out in law. However, every one of us at Aurora shares a common goal, which is to do our very best (but only when it is safe to do so) to enable children in the designated year groups to access more of their education at school. Whether we can achieve that in June, or even ahead of the summer holidays, remains to be seen. There may well be a host of reasons as to why we might not be able to achieve that goal. Nevertheless, we intend to explore what we might be able to do safely.

Therefore, from Aurora's point of view, we are going to take a very calm and measured approach to planning and risk assessment in our schools, rather than producing fixed plans right now. Yesterday,

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the Trust's Executive Leaders and Central Teams met online with all of our Headteachers to decide upon a common set of principles to guide our decision-making. We have adopted a common set of decision-making principles, because the Trust cannot impose a *one-size-fits-all* plan to suit every school, because every school is different in so many ways. Following yesterday's discussions, and over the next two weeks, each school's leadership teams and site staff will embark upon a major piece of work to risk assess every area of their school buildings. Those risk assessments will be vital for us to evaluate:

- Whether it can be made sufficiently safe for children and staff to reopen for all pupils in each of the designated year groups
- Whether it is safe for children and staff to reopen for some pupils in each of the selected year groups
- Whether it is safe for children and staff to reopen for just one year group at a time, perhaps on a rota basis
- Whether it is unsafe to reopen

As you will appreciate, the physical layout of our six school buildings are all different and so that factor alone will guide what each school will be able to achieve and this may lead to variations in what can be achieved at different schools. That is inevitable, but please rest assured that all of us at Aurora will do what we can to achieve our common goal.

Once that planning and risk assessment work has been completed, I will update you further – however more communication will obviously follow directly from each school to its own parents and carers.

Finally, I would like to make an important point that I feel I need to share with you. The things I have written today are what we would like to do. In an ideal world (i.e. not the one we all temporarily inhabit) we would love to get all children back into school as soon as humanly possible. What I have outlined above is our response to the recommendations made by Mr Johnson and the Government. However, as a Dad myself, I realise that some of you will still be very afraid of the world as it is, and despite any assurances from me or others, may well consider that you cannot send your child(ren) back to school at this stage. Please rest assured that we understand. There will be no pressure applied from us (or indeed, by the Government) if you choose to keep your child(ren) at home until a future date, when you feel it is safer. All I am trying to do here is to give you an absolute assurance that we are going to try our best to give you the choice as to whether or not you wish to send your child back to school at some point this side of the summer holidays. That choice may actually be taken out of our hands due to external factors (such as the 5 Key Tests not being satisfied) or by

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internal factors, following the risk assessments I have outlined in this letter. However, we will at least try to help you make an informed choice.

What we are unable to do is offer a world of zero risk; however if we can mitigate risk to a minimum then we will let you know what we can provide and you can then decide whether you want to send your child into school.

I shall write to you again once the main part of our planning is completed. I apologise for the length of this letter and so below I have included a list of responses to some Frequently Asked Questions.

Please bear with us – you have been magnificent in your support for us thus far. I have said to you in my first letter that we need to work together. Thank you for all that you are doing to help us to keep education going, be that by helping to home-school your child, through helping them access online learning or just by providing some daily structure to their life in this topsy-turvy world. All of your support will continue to make a big difference and all of us at Aurora really appreciate what you are doing to help us.

Please continue to take care of yourselves and your loved ones.

With my very best wishes to you all

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Some useful links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our plan to rebuild The UK Government s COVID-19 recovery strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our_plan_to_rebuild_The_UK_Government_s_COVID-19_recovery_strategy.pdf)



Frequently Asked Questions

QUESTION	RESPONSE
What Year Groups are we talking about when the Government refers to the 'wider reopening of schools'?	Children in Nursery; Reception; Year 1 and Year 6 There is also an ambition for Year 10 students to spend some 'face-to-face' time in school before the summer holidays
Will all of these Year Groups go back to school on 1 st June?	No. The 1 st June is simply the <i>very earliest date</i> on which schools might be able to reopen more widely
Will the childcare provision for children of keyworkers and for other vulnerable children continue as usual?	Yes. The provision that has been operating since Mon 23 rd March will continue, including through the forthcoming May Half-Term week (with the exception of the Bank Holiday Monday)
Is it the law for schools to reopen for these year groups?	No. The plans made by the Prime Minister and the Government are recommended only. The legal responsibility as to whether (or not) to reopen schools more widely, rests with the Trust (or with Local Authorities for LA schools). The Government Guidance published on 14 th May is very clear on this.
What are Aurora's schools doing right now?	All of our schools have childcare provision in place, which will continue. All of our Heads and senior teams are now working with site teams and other staff to conduct thorough risk assessments to decide whether or not it is safe to reopen more widely
Will all of Aurora's schools have the same plan for reopening?	No. Each school will have a different plan based upon the layout of buildings and the number of staff available to accept more children.
What if your risk assessments conclude that it is not safe for a school to reopen more widely?	In that case, we will not reopen a school. Health and safety of children and adults will be our primary concern.
Who will tell us what is going to happen at our child's school?	Each school will communicate directly with their own parents. This is because each school will have a different plan.
I am still very worried about my child's health and safety. What will happen if I do not send my child back to school?	Aurora will not enforce attendance and neither will the Government. Parents will not receive a penalty or fine for non-attendance. Our approach is that we will see exactly what we believe will be safe and then will encourage you to send your child to school. However, you as parents and carers can make an informed choice whether or not you do so.

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My child is in a year group that has not been identified above. What will happen for those year groups?

Now the Government has stated that it is their 'ambition' for other pupils in Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 to spend 'at least a month' in school before the summer break. They also say that this would happen only 'if feasible' and that it 'may have to be reviewed'. At the moment, we are unable to plan for any extra year groups until we have conducted our risk assessments as above. Our best estimate is that the Government's ambitions are unlikely to be achieved by schools across the country – however, we will do our very best to do what we can and we will continue to communicate with you. In the interim, we will still commit to providing ongoing resources to support all children who are not attending school.

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