

Worlingham Primary School
Covid Expansion of Provision Plan
Reasoning and thinking behind our approach

Introduction and background

In putting together this plan, we have looked of course at government guidance on the expansion of the current provision in schools; taken into account other government advice for the wider public returning to work; looked at what has been implemented in other countries which have started to return children to schools, such as Denmark or France; looked at advice from the unions and local authority; and also looked at evidence and answers from government scientists that are in the public domain. Then, we have applied that to the logistical challenges of our own school.

Having taken all of this into account, we have taken the decision that we are in a position to expand the provision in school to children of those year groups – once that is confirmed by government – but only potentially from 8th June. However, there are additional measures we will be putting in place to secure the safety of children and adults in school as far as we possibly can.

These additional measures have been implemented because:

- Government guidance is a little contradictory in places, asking us for example ‘not to use rotas’ and ‘putting children in classes with a maximum of 15’ but at the same time, ‘ensuring as far as possible children are kept 2m apart in classes’
- Wider advice to the general public has complete clarity – 2m social distancing should be enforced at all times with non-household members
- The government approach seems to be based on the idea that children do not catch or spread the disease as much as adults. Actually, it seems they do not get symptoms as strongly as adults, but the ONS report of 15th May indicates children DO get the disease as much as adults, whilst during the government briefing on 11th May the government’s Chief Scientific Officer stated that transmission rates involving children was ‘unclear’. The DfE’s Chief Scientific Officer told the Commons’ science and technology committee on Wednesday 13th May that it was ‘possible’ that expanding the provision in schools could result in ‘hundreds of transmission vectors’ depending on their size.
- During the government briefing of 11th May, the Chief Medical Officer said that there ‘needed to be a debate about teacher safety’. The implication here is of course that one hadn’t taken place.
- The devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and N.Ireland are not taking this decision at this time, based on their own scientific advice.
- The British Medical Association said on 15th May that they did not support the phased return of children to schools at this time

- The DfE's scientific advice released on 15th May states: *There is no evidence to suggest that children transmit the virus any more than adults. Some studies suggest younger children may transmit less, but this evidence is mixed and provides a low degree of confidence at best.*

However, It is also correct to say that, of course, the government have said schools will only expand their provision if it is safe for children to return to school in England providing relevant guidance is followed; on 16th May, the deputy chief medical officer said that "schools will not be swarming with cases"; that time away from school can be very damaging to children (more so those who are more vulnerable or disadvantaged – less so for those able to access and engage with online learning); that Suffolk/Norfolk have relatively low levels of infection; and of course that schools play a role in childcare to enable parents to go back to work.

As a result of this balanced approach, we are therefore expanding our provision but have agreed to put the additional measures in place as outlined in our plan, and delay the start of that expansion for at least a week.

Other things to consider

As such, this plan has been designed to reduce risk to staff and children. But, I cannot write to you today to say that risk has been removed, and neither has the government said that. The government guidance is also clear in saying that 'primary school aged children cannot be expected to maintain social distancing' (or, as someone else also said, 'schools can't even control the spread of nits'...)

Much of the final decision in sending your child will be based on your individual circumstances and that of your child(ren).

- For some children, there is a risk that the return at this time will be more socially damaging than socially beneficial for children. Children will want to play with each other and instead will be encouraged to play away from each other for long periods of time.
- We are being advised to remove any soft furnishings, soft toys and toys that are difficult to clean. This takes away most wooden resources, small construction such as Lego and Kinex, Playdough, sand, water etc. Resources would therefore be very limited, which would then question the ability of EYFS staff to deliver their normal high quality play provision.
- Some children could be troubled by conflicting messages. They are allowed into school alongside staff and other children but will still not be able to see wider family. They will also not be able to see the friends they see in school outside of school.
- Some children could find it hard to understand why some children are not being permitted to come in to school yet they are – or indeed, vice versa. We would suggest that if your child raises questions you be open and talk to them about it to help them understand your decision.

- It is quite usual that at stressful times, a number of children need their parents to come into school to help them settle. This will not be possible and most children will be coming in after a long period of not leaving their parents at all. Some children, who have can be particularly anxious, can at times need physical intervention to get them through the door and at times this has involved close physical contact with the parent as well as child. We will not be able to do that, and in extreme cases we may have to send children home.
- Some children may be distressed on arrival. The classroom will be different to what they are used to and many will need comforting, possibly at the same time. There are possible implications for children's happiness and willingness to want to come back to school.
- Most children will be returning to school, possibly feeling very vulnerable after a long period of time away from anybody who doesn't live with them. For many children the member of staff they are with, although known to them, will not be their trusted and familiar class teacher.
- But, for all children, school will provide a familiar place that isn't home; we will be able to offer more of a discrete education as far as possible; and we will always try where possible to put children with friends and familiar staff.

I appreciate – I genuinely do – that this decision will be a hard one for most and an easy one for some! I hope with this document and the letter explaining our plan that you can understand how school will look and how it will be different. It is important to remember that the only key difference between our plan and the government guidance is that the guidance says 15 children in a class, full time. All of our other measures are in line with their guidance. We have agreed that 15 is too many given the size of our classrooms and social distancing guidance, and will limit those numbers to 8-10 depending on the specific room (with slightly different arrangements for EYFS). This has implications for the number of children in school at one time, and as such may require the use of a rota.

We will support you in whatever you decide to do – we will organise and teach children if they return, we will support families who choose not to send their children in by continuing remote learning and as much, increased, contact as we can. We will always strongly encourage children to be in school full time, but these are unprecedented times.

Therefore, by Friday, 29th May, please email the school office or phone and speak to someone, letting us know:

Child(ren)'s name(s), classes, and whether or not they will be attending full time potentially from 8th June.

Paul Seeman

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