



St. Mary's Preparatory School
A love of learning for life

BACK TO SCHOOL

A guide to a smooth and safe transition





MESSAGE FROM THE HEADMASTER

Dear Parent

Thank you for your support since our return from the Easter break during which time we have transitioned fully to online teaching and learning. I am very proud of the way our staff have risen to the challenge and for their commitment and creativity in delivering such excellent provision at such short notice. I am also very proud of our children to see how well they have adapted so quickly to this unfamiliar approach to learning.

As you will know, the government has requested that we reopen our school and classrooms to Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 from 1 June. We are very pleased to reopen for these classes as we believe that children need their friends and the nurturing school environment, and the classroom is definitely the best place for their education. We have given great consideration to opening other classes in addition to these but unfortunately, we are not permitted to deviate from the government's directive.

We are following the Department for Education's guidance closely as we prepare for reopening. These measures include teaching small classes or clusters of pupils (often referred to as 'bubbles'), social distancing in the school buildings as much as possible and an enhanced cleaning regime both at the end of the day and during the day – as well as regular and careful handwashing. We are making preparations now to make sure all this is in place and I would like to assure you that we shall only reopen after completing a thorough risk assessment.

Although we understand it is not possible to eliminate all risk, with the right precautions in place, schools are considered to be very low risk environments for the coronavirus. Furthermore, we are also of the opinion that children's mental health and well-being can suffer in isolation – a view that is being increasingly shared amongst the medical experts – so there are risks in children continuing to stay at home by themselves away from their peers for prolonged periods of time.

I do need to point out that, as some of our teaching staff return to the classroom fulltime, we need to balance this with providing those pupils who will not be returning with the ability to continue with their online learning combined with regular check-ins with their teacher. The exception to this is where our Early Years online provision will have to be downsized to enable staff to care for the needs of our young pupils on site.

As staff contact with children is being kept to a minimum, children will be with the same teacher all day. Due to the need to work in small pods this could entail pupils returning to School but not being taught within School by their usual teacher. They may have their teacher facilitating the online learning within School but pupils have the added advantage of being able to interact with their peers albeit at a socially appropriate distance.

Some of our sister schools in Switzerland and Vietnam have reopened recently. They report the joyful return of their students and we anticipate celebrating at the front gate when some of our own pupils return. We look forward to a time when all our children can come back to school; in the meantime, other year groups will continue with their current online learning programme.

Finally, I would like to clarify the school's position on fees for the rest of the summer term for those who are returning to school. Although we did communicate previously that once schools reopen we would revert to normal fees, we have decided to waive this for the remainder of the summer term. The exceptional circumstances, the economic situation, and the value we place on our relationship with you – our parent community – means we have decided the existing discount will continue for this academic year. We hope that this, combined with the freezing of tuition fees for next year, will go some way to assisting you.

Thank you once again for your support of the school this summer term, and for your encouragement and feedback. As ever, please let me know if you have any questions.

With kind regards,

Rob Harmer
Headmaster

RE-OPENING APPROACH & TIMELINE

In developing the plan for our return to school we have followed government guidelines, listened to your views through our Parent Survey and built on learnings from other Cognita schools across the world.

The staggered starts by year groups helps us to welcome the school community back through our doors in a safe, orderly and effective manner.

The schedule for return is set out clearly below, together with new timings for the school day.

Years	Date of return	School day	Drop off	Pick up
Nursery	Monday 1 st June	08:45-14:45 Morning session 08:45-11:45 Afternoon session 11:45-14:45	8:45am or 11:45am	11:45am or 2:45pm
Kindergarten	Monday 1 st June	09:00-15:00	9:00am	3:00pm
Year 1	Monday 1 st June	08:30-14:30	8:30am	2:30pm
Year 6	Monday 1 st June	08:20-15:00	8:20am	3:00pm
Years 2-5	TBC	TBC	TBC	TBC

A COMBINED TRANSITION TO TEACHING & LEARNING

As a school we are committed to balancing the needs of both the students in our physical classrooms and also those who remain in our virtual classrooms.

To do this we will:

- Provide Teaching and Learning via Seesaw and Microsoft Teams within the classroom to Years 1 and 6 with the social and emotional well-being of the children being catered for by the class teacher.
- Continue the online educational provision for students who are not yet in the 'returning' year groups.
- Continue to provide online teaching and learning for those students who have actively decided not to return to school for the time being despite being in the 'returning' year groups. This will be continually reviewed depending on the numbers we have in School.
- A reduced online learning offer will be available to our Nursery and Kindergarten pupils who are not returning due to the staff capacity to provide this being affected by the need to physically teach and care for the children in School.



NEW GUIDANCE DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

We will all have to adapt our behaviour during the school day to ensure everyone's safety.

SOCIAL DISTANCING IN THE CLASSROOM

We are following the government advice: *...early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain 2 metres apart from each other and staff.*

We know young children will not stay apart whilst playing, especially after not seeing each other for such a long time. To mitigate the risk we are following the advice that students are split into 'micro-classes'.

Government guidance stipulates a maximum size of 15 per class. We have set a maximum of 12. This means that students will be assigned a class and will stay within it for the whole day, including at lunch and breaks. The teacher will also stay with them.

We are using all the available space and staff we have to achieve this government stipulation so your child may unfortunately not be in their usual classroom or with their usual teacher.

BREAK TIMES

We will stagger break times to avoid classes mixing. It's not something we do happily as playtime is a key part of learning, but it is a significant risk mitigation.

MOVING AROUND SCHOOL

We will be operating a one-way system to manage the flow of people around the building. We have added signage and floor markings to help everyone maintain social distancing.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

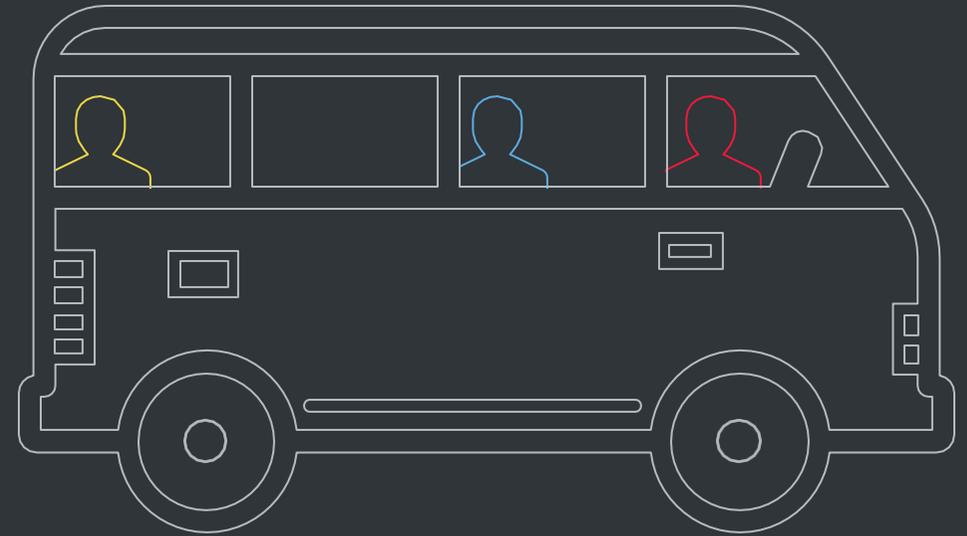
We will continue to urge children to regularly wash hands just as we did pre-lockdown. We have enough washrooms to support this. Extra supplies of soap and paper towels have been purchased. You can help by reminding your children of the need to regularly wash their hands for 20 seconds by singing happy birthday twice. PPE will be worn in the event of administering first aid, providing intimate care or in the event of a pupil displaying symptoms of the virus and requiring isolation in the medical room.

DROP OFF AND PICK-UP

To avoid parents having to enter the School site we will have marked drop off and pick-up bays where the children will be escorted to and from their classrooms and handed over to their parent of carer. It is vitally important that you arrive at the required time to ensure a smooth transition and minimise the risk of social mixing.



SCHOOL SERVICES



Transport

- As per government advice we urge you to avoid public transport, if possible. If not possible please follow guidelines around face coverings and carry hand sanitiser with you or wear gloves.
- Please follow drop off and pick up times carefully. They are designed to avoid crowding.
- The School minibuses will not be used for any educational activity during this phased return.

Catering:

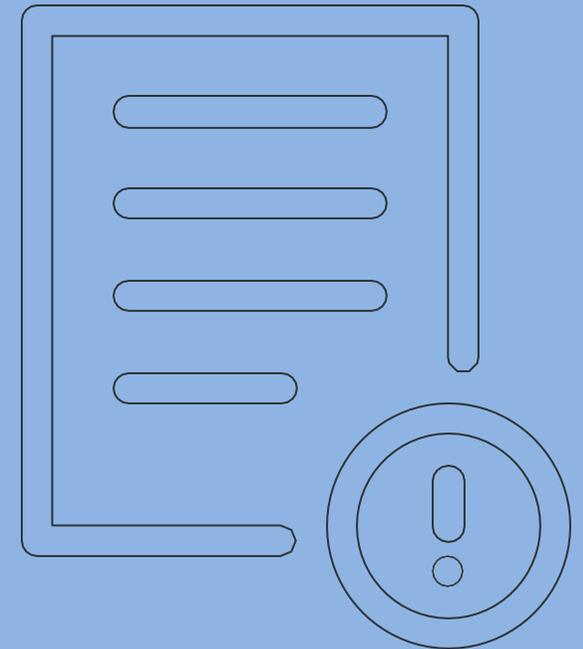
- Packed lunches and a morning snack will be provided by our caterer, offering vegetarian and meat options on a daily basis.
- We are unable to provide a hot meal due to the size of our kitchen facility and the inability of staff to social distance whilst preparing hot food.
- Please provide your child with a water bottle.
- Milk and water will be available in the Early Years.

Extra Curricular:

- We will not be offering before and after school care for the time being, although we are eager to offer this service as soon as is feasible
- There will be no extra curricular clubs or events such as sports fixtures
- Extra curricular activity is an important part of the educational experience and we hope to return to a normal schedule as soon as government guidance allows

PARENT GUIDE AT A GLANCE

1. Talk to your child about the new measures in this guide.
2. Take note of any changes to the timings of the school day for your child.
3. If you have decided not to send your child back, please confirm this. If you subsequently change your mind, please give us 48 hours notice.
4. Pupils can wear their Summer uniform on their return to School.



FAQS



WILL THE SCHOOL FEES DISCOUNT BE REMOVED?

No. Although we did communicate previously that once schools re-open we would revert to normal fees we have decided to waive this for the remainder of the summer term. The exceptional circumstances, the economic situation, and the value we place on our relationship with you – our parent community – means we have decided the existing discount continues for this academic year. The fee freeze for next year remains too.

WHAT'S YOUR POLICY ON VISITORS?

Visitors are welcome to the school but are required to book in advance and we will be following social distancing guidelines.

As parents you are always welcome to contact us and arrange a (socially distanced) face to face meeting.

DOES MY CHILD WEAR SCHOOL UNIFORM AND WHAT DO THEY NEED TO BRING INTO SCHOOL?

Yes, the children can wear their Summer uniform. They need to bring in a coat and a water bottle too. They do not need to bring anything else – no cuddly toys, no book bags or PE kit. Stationery equipment will be provided. Due to the Coronavirus living on surfaces for up to 72 hours we are unable at this stage to be exchanging books and completing reading records.

WHAT IF I CHOOSE NOT TO SEND MY CHILD BACK TO SCHOOL?

We understand that some parents and students may be wary about physically returning to school and we will do our best to deliver a suitable level of online provision for these students. This has to be on a 'best endeavours' basis as we look to balance a lower number of staff across an increased number of classes as a result of limiting the number of students in each class.

HOW ARE YOU RECORDING ABSENCE OF PUPILS WHEN SCHOOL RE-OPENS?

If you choose not to send your child back to school for the time being, for those in the 'returning' year groups, this will be recorded as an 'Authorised Absence'.

WHAT IS YOUR CLEANING REGIME?

We have a robust cleaning regime throughout the school day with a focus on washrooms and high-touch areas. At the end of the day we also repeat this and pay particular attention on the common areas of the school. On a Friday evening we do a weekly enhanced clean of all rooms in the school. In the instance of a confirmed COVID-19 case we will do a deep clean which includes all surface areas and carpets. In all cases we use coronavirus approved disinfectants/aerosols, and our cleaners have ordered sufficient stocks.

WILL CHILDREN AND STAFF BE EXPECTED TO WEAR FACE COVERINGS ON SITE?

No. This is the government advice: *Wearing a face covering or face mask in schools or other education settings is not recommended.*

Face coverings are primarily worn to prevent the wearer from spreading the virus rather than catching it. Primary age children are likely to be distracted and discomforted by the wearing of such an item and cannot be expected to do so safely.

If a pupil or member of staff wishes to wear a face covering they will be allowed to do so. We request they follow guidance on the safe method of using and when removing it should be placed carefully into a sealed plastic bag.

I'M A KEY WORKER CAN MY CHILD (REN) STILL ATTEND SCHOOL.

For the moment, yes, children of key workers who are not in the year groups returning can continue to utilise our Key Worker provision. For those key-worker children returning to school we would appreciate you keeping to the new drop off and pick up times to minimise the need for social mixing.

WELLBEING

The transition back to school will still be a challenge for all of us trying to adjust to a new way of 'being', coping with fear of the unknown and in some cases balancing a mix of online and face to face learning. The wellbeing of our students, parents and teaching staff is our highest priority and we are lucky to be part of Cognita who have been able to provide lots of resources to support our school communities since the start of the lockdown.

This includes live webinars with our education experts, podcasts, and a series of videos and resources on wellbeing in these strange times for both students and parents. Members of our parent community have even shared how they have coped with lockdown. This evolving set of content can all be found at www.cognita.com



POSITIVE FEEDBACK

It was great to hear some of your feedback about how the school responded during lockdown.

Here are a few of the comments that make us feel proud.

“We always knew that St. Mary's was brilliant, but you've exceeded all expectations”

“The quality of the online learning and the ability to connect with teachers and peers is unparalleled.”

“Thank you so much for all that the school is doing to support the children.”

“Thank you for a truly outstanding week of online teaching. All of the teachers have done an amazing job.”

”Our son is receiving such a fantastic level of education, we appreciate what you are all doing everyday.”

“The activities are such fun it makes me envious that I am not at school!”