



Alameda Middle School

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22nd May 2020

Weekly Update

Dear parents and carers,

I hope that this letter finds you and your families well. This week's letter is an important one; I wanted to take the opportunity to let you know about some fantastic work I have seen recently and I also wanted to update you on our plans for wider re-opening from 1st June. As you are probably aware, there is a lot of government information regarding the reopening of schools and we are working very hard to address all the necessary changes to reduce the risks, to help everyone stay safe.

Celebrating Effort, Achievement and Excellence

It has been great to see some amazing things that pupils have produced as part of their home learning. Mr Harley has put together a celebration of some of the fantastic items we have received recently. 'What's going on? - ALAMEDA VARIETY SHOW part 1 can be found on this page:

<http://www.alamedamiddleschool.org.uk/page/?title=Work+to+Celebrate&pid=201>

Well done to all of the pupils included here.

There are more wonderful items on our website.

I have started to receive some "Wow" award nominations and will be following these up next week.

Activities to support home learning

I would like to thank all of you who have provided positive feedback on your child's experience with **Google Classroom**. The user guide and letter to pupils introducing Google Classroom was included with last week's letter and also sent to the pupils via Edulink. For your reference they are saved on our website:

<http://www.alamedamiddleschool.org.uk/page/default.asp?pid=216>.

We will continue to develop our use of Google Classroom. I am sure many of you will want to join me in thanking Mr Beavis for helping to make sure the launch of Google Classroom went relatively smoothly and that the small glitch around groupings was sorted really quickly. I appreciate that some of you are still disappointed not to have live lessons on Google Classrooms. This is not something we are able to do at the current time, There is, however, more interaction with teachers and while this will become more pressured as some groups start to return to school, we will still endeavour to continue to improve this.

It has been great to see the pupils posting "assignments" this week and also to see our teachers have been able to provide feedback which I hope the pupils find useful.

Next week starts with a bank holiday and would usually have been a half term break. School remains open from Tuesday onwards to the small group of children for whom in school provision has been in place throughout and are also hosting the holiday provision organised by Inspiring Music. As it is a holiday, there will be less provision for home learning. There will be some optional English and maths activities on **Google Classroom** and also on the **Weekly Overviews**. **We advise that everyone takes a break through half term week** but understand that some pupils may want to continue with some activities, hence providing some optional activity resources.

We will be stopping the weekly overviews soon as we complete the transition to Google Classroom. For this week, they can be found here:

[Year 5 Home Learning Weekly Overview](#)

[Year 6 Home Learning Weekly Overview](#)

[Year 7 Home Learning Weekly Overview](#)

[Year 8 Home Learning Weekly Overview](#)

Paper copies of activities can also be collected from school.

School closure for the bank holiday – Monday 25th May

All parents and carers of children who have been attending our daily provision should already be aware that we will be closed for the bank holiday.

Feedback from the recent Edulink questionnaire

Thank you to everyone who responded to the recent survey. Your responses have been useful to us in order that we can continue to try to improve the way in which we set activities. The survey was a way to gain more information regarding internet access at home, how well families could access the activities provided and to highlight where there may be difficulties, and to provide us with an indication of other communication between home and school – such as the form tutor calls, emails and postcards.

It was really good to hear how useful the majority of you have found the way we provided the activities and hope that improvements we have made, such as the introduction of Google Classroom have improved this further. We can, however see that there are areas such as more direct teacher contact where you feel we can and also acknowledge from wider feedback that we may need to expand the questions when we contact you in future. Where some of you had not received contact from form tutors or were unable to access the activities, we hope that this has now been resolved by more form tutor contact and the changes to the way the activities are set. We will be asking you about your experience with Google Classroom and for a further update on the contact you have received in a couple of weeks. Again, thank you for supporting us in this way, it really does help us to be able to continue to improve the ways in which we work.

Planned Wider Reopening – From 1st June for Year 6

This section of the letter has been written in conjunction with other headteachers in the FARM (Firs, Alameda, Russell and Maulden) schools. We have worked together to try to create a co-ordinated response. We will also work with Redborne. You will have seen in the national media that schools' gradual reopening is a hugely contentious topic and one which has caused much debate. As a result, guidance from the DfE and others has been, and continues to be, constantly changing, making it incredibly

difficult to set any plans in stone. Alameda can still only plan to reopen to Year 6 from 1st June at the earliest, **if** the government decides it is safe at that time, and even then, we will keep this under constant review. As you will be aware, the announcement on this is not due until May 28th.

Since I last wrote to you, the teachers, support staff and governors have been working tirelessly to maintain home learning, keep in contact with our families, run our closure provision for key workers, digest and implement the DfE guidance, seek to find answers to our numerous questions, assess and mitigate risks and plan all the actions required to ensure that school is as safe as it can be.

At the time of writing, I must be very honest and say that I am still working to finalise the risk assessment and confirm the availability of sufficient staffing to run the school safely. I did, however, want to provide an update and be clear that the details below are how we plan to proceed. It may, however, be subject to change and further details will be provided once groupings are clarified. The government announcement on the 28th will also provide possible changes.

I think it is important to emphasize that school will look very different to the children when they are able to return to school. We are making some very significant alterations to the way we are doing things in order to minimise any possible transmission. We greatly appreciate your support during this very difficult period of time.

At all times, as has been the case throughout the current pandemic, we will be adhering to the government's guidance. Our infection control and protective measures will be based on the government's 5 key approaches to minimising transmission in schools. Anyone with COVID-19 symptoms, or who lives with someone with symptoms, must not attend school; frequent handwashing protocols; good respiratory hygiene (catch it, kill it, bin it); frequent cleaning of 'high contact' surfaces and areas through the day and creating 'safe bubbles' in school, where smaller groups of children create a bubble and, via staggered lunches, play zones etc, minimise wider contact.

This will lead to more specific safety routines, such as comprehensive cleaning regimes, timetabled handwashing, staggered breaktimes in set zones, children being asked to enter school through a specific gate, parents being asked to drop children at a particular area, capping class sizes at 15 (after a through measuring exercise, based on our room sizes, group sizes, in order that we maintain a 2 metre distance between pupils and also between pupils and the teacher, will have to be between 9 and 12 for most rooms other than the larger areas such as the hall), seating children at individual rather than group desks and staggering the beginning and end of the day times. Classrooms will look very different, with minimal furniture and resources.

As a result of the requirements, you will realise that the organisation of the school day will be very different and children may be in different rooms to those they are most familiar with and also with different teachers and teaching assistants. Lots of things will need to change to comply with the guidance. We will be operating a "primary" model, with pupils staying in one room throughout the day. Equally, we will adapt the curriculum so that we are prioritising 'settling in' building community and reducing anxiety activities, building in time for handwashing etc. We also have to ensure we minimise resources needed (and therefore reduce any possible sharing).

Significant social distancing measures will be put in place, but the government has made it clear that 'early years and primary age children cannot be expected to remain 2 metres apart from each other and staff'. Whilst it is great that the government is being very realistic, it does mean that I cannot guarantee that such young children will be able to comply with social distancing requirements. The youngest children attending Alameda are of course at the top end of the primary age range and so this does not provide the challenges our lower schools are facing with four and five year olds. We will also emphasize key messages about social distancing and put measures in place to support this. It is, however, very difficult to control the actions and impulses of humans whatever their age, and this can be particularly true of children.

A key principle of the measures is that "bubbles" or groups of children and teachers must remain consistent. Children should not be moving between "bubbles" and staff should be as consistent as possible. This requirement will mean that, unfortunately, we will be unable to provide our normal breakfast club or after school provision for the time being.

I realise that these changes are hugely inconvenient and highly undesirable, but we must adhere to the guidance to ensure everyone's safety, and can only apologise. I must also apologise for the fact that exact details are not yet available. I will be writing to you again next week once we have finalised staffing and other arrangements. I will also clarify for each family on how the details below may apply to them.

Other key information:

- School will have a staggered start and finish time to allow pupils to arrive safely.
- School will close on Wednesday after lunch (to all but key workers) – this will enable teachers to plan lessons, plan home learning for year groups not at school, make contact with parents and children in Years 5, 7 and 8 and allow staff to clean resources. It also means we can reduce the need for swapping 'cover' staff.
- School meals will continue to be provided, but will be limited to a school packed lunch. More information on an ordering system for these will follow once finalised by Alliance in Partnership. Lunches will be eaten in the classroom, not the dining hall. Alternatively, your child can continue to bring their own packed lunch from home.
- We will be unable to run any extra-curricular clubs until further notice.
- Children will be expected to wear school uniform as usual please.
- Parents of Year 6 children will be notified by a further letter next week (during half term) which adults are with them, what time they start/finish school, how to get in touch etc.

Splitting the year 6 form groups into groups will be done fairly and with thought and consideration, by the staff who know the groups well. I am afraid, due to the already highly complex nature of all these arrangements, we will not be able alter your child's grouping.

We totally understand that this will already be a time of high anxiety for you and the children, and by not being able to come into their own class and form tutor or usual teachers will only make this harder for everyone. Believe me, if there was anything we could do to avoid it, we would. I can assure you that all the staff at Alameda are excellent, and your child will be really looked after and supported in their new group.

As I said in my previous letter, the government would like to strongly encourage parents of children in returning year groups, to send their children into school. Getting back to school in some form before the summer will enormously support children's mental well-being, social skills and academic progress. However, the government has made it clear that there will not be any penalties at this stage for non-attendance. For the time being, the school's usual attendance policy (including the use of fines) will not be used. If you do send your child back into school from 1st June we would expect consistent attendance please, only being absent for any illness.

We will write to year 6 families again next week. While we are planning our provision to accommodate the whole of the year group, we appreciate that some may not attend, either through personal preference or due to being in a category listed below. As these are unusual circumstances, we will provide details of the attendance processes to be used. In our letter next week

- If a child, young person or a member of staff lives with someone who is clinically vulnerable (but not clinically extremely vulnerable), including those who are pregnant, they can attend their education or childcare setting.
- If a child, young person or staff member lives in a household with someone who is extremely clinically vulnerable, as set out in the COVID-19: COVID-19: guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable, it is advised they only attend an education or childcare setting if stringent social distancing can be adhered to and, in the case of children, they are able to understand and follow those instructions.
- If stringent social distancing cannot be adhered to they will not be expected to attend. They should be supported to learn or work at home.
- School will follow the latest Government advice on implementing social distancing <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-protective-measures-in-education-and-childcare-settings>

We encourage parents and pupils not use public transport and to walk or cycle to school where possible. We also ask that only one parent/carer per child to arrive and collect children please.

We will be continuing to provide Key Worker places for essential front line workers, as the government has requested. This will continue to be Monday to Friday, all day. If you feel you now require a key worker place, please contact the school office as soon as possible on office@alamedamiddleschool.org.uk.

Some Practical Advice

Central Bedfordshire Council have provided some advice for parents to support children in preparing to return to school. You may want to consider the following advice.

Advice for Parents

1. Set up a back to school routine at home:

- 1 to 2 weeks before returning to school, have consistent bed and wake up routines (9-11hrs for 5-13yr olds; 8-10hrs for 14-17yr olds)

- Set up a practical chart showing the steps needed to get ready for school: getting up, breakfast, getting dressed, getting equipment ready, travelling to school.

2. Talk to your child about going back to school: They may have some anxiety; talk to them about their worries. Acknowledge these feelings; reassure them that these feelings will pass; that you are there to take care of them and that when they go to school, staff will be available to listen and take care of them too.

- If the school has provided guidance about returning to school, share this with your child. (some of our plans are included in this letter, more will follow next week)
- Consider informing the school if you feel your child is having difficulty managing their worries (we welcome this – either to your child's form tutor, year leader or our pastoral support officers – Mrs Richardson and Mrs Knight. Mrs Fox is our deputy head who line manages the year leaders and also leads on safeguarding)
- Using pictures or drawings in cartoon type stories (known as social stories) can help children understand what is going to happen in school and can help calm anxieties, especially with younger children. For older children, healthy family routines are important with boundaries around use of technology, eating and sleep routines.
- Remind your child of the things that they enjoyed about school; the things you know to be the same for them when they return like their teacher, their friends, the rooms in the school; knowing how the school will structure the day will also help here.
- Consider making something with your child that they could take back to school either to say how they are feeling or showing something they have done during lock down
- Remind your child of what's in their power—washing hands thoroughly and often, coughing and sneezing into their elbow, getting plenty of sleep, etc.

A short video from the Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families, provides guidance to parents and carers about how they can help children and young people manage their mental health and wellbeing during any disruption caused by the Coronavirus:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnANLAcPRZ4&feature=youtu.be>

Risk assessment and other key points

We are currently completing a full, health and safety risk assessment with the support of our health and safety advisor. We are also working with the staff to ensure that all planning is in place to support the wider re-opening. With this in mind, and to allow for final preparations with a larger group of staff, our first day back for year 6 will be on Tuesday 2nd June or our part day on Wednesday 3rd June rather than Monday 1st June. We will confirm this in a letter next week along with more details about the provision. The reasons for this are to allow us more time to respond to anything announced on the 28th May, to allow for some staff training and preparation and to potentially offer a shortened day as part of an integration plan.

What about Year 5, 7 and 8?

As you will already know, the government's published ambition is to bring back all primary aged children for at least some time before the summer holidays, again, as long as it is safe to do so. The government have not shared with us how they think this will be possible. I am also aware that there has been significant lobbying about the needs of a three-tier area, including news coverage of the decision to focus on year 6 and not year 8. The local authority continues to lobby central government to see if bringing our youngsters at transition points into school sooner is possible. As I said before, planning for transition between Alameda and Redborne in these difficult times has been discussed and more information will follow.

I am deeply saddened by the fact that we do not have our whole school community together yet, but know that it is completely impossible at this time, whilst the measures outline above are still necessary. We do understand what difficulties this is causing for families, and we are aware of the huge sacrifices that you have already made. We miss everyone very much and just want to get 'back to normal', but, like other schools, we just cannot do this yet.

Thank you for continuing to support your children's learning from home. This will make an enormous difference to their confidence levels when they do return. After everyone has had a rest over half term, please continue to do everything you can to keep learning going at home using Google Classroom, Oak Academy lessons and resources and BBC Bitesize resources. I ask that those of you with children in years 5, 7 and 8 try to understand that from 1st June, almost all of our teachers will be teaching all week, so they will have less time to prepare the content for Google Classroom or the paper copies, reply to emails etc. Every single teacher is determined to find the time to provide these things for you and your children, but please bear with us as we will be very stretched from 1st June onwards.

I will be in touch with year 6 families again next week (during half term), giving you much more detailed information about returning to school and your child's group. The government should make a final decision about whether it is safe to return to school by Friday 28th May which we will be able to comment on by 29th May. Please look out for an email from us around this time as there may be further announcements that we need to respond to.

And finally

As many of you will know, this week has been mental health awareness week. The children in school, along with the staff have been discussing their kind actions:

- J and his children painted some stones and then did a virtual treasure hunt with his dad (grandad) in their garden
- G thought about a friend she hadn't spoken to for a while and called for a chat
- M told had been out delivering a little present to some friends
- L cooked tea for his family last night
- J did the ironing
- F mopped the floor, emptied the dishwasher
- H and E are helping by walking the dog
- J shared her shortbread biscuits with her sister
- J and L sent a letter to his childminder to say hello

It came as no surprise to learn what a lovely, kind bunch of people we have at Alameda staff and pupils). At times like this, I think it is important to reflect on the importance of kindness and make sure we are taking the time to care for ourselves and others. I know

that there will be many similar stories to be shared about the wonderful children at home.
I'd love to hear them.

Thank you for your ongoing support.

Stay safe

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Warner', written in a cursive style.

Maxine Warner
Headteacher