



The Federation of St Bede's & St Bernadette Catholic Schools

Federation Headteacher: Ewa Ostrynska

St Bede's Catholic Infant & Nursery School

Telephone: 0208 674 7292

Email: office@st-bedes.lambeth.sch.uk

Website: www.st-bedes.lambeth.sch.uk

St Bernadette Catholic Junior School

Telephone: 0208 673 2061

Email: office@stbernadette.lambeth.co.uk

Website: www.stbernadette.co.uk

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Dear Parents, Carers and Staff,

Thank you for completing the surveys sent out last week. It was reassuring to see such an incredibly high response to both questionnaires. Thank you for your honest opinions and for sharing some possible ways forward. It has become apparent that the vast majority of parents and staff are not confident that we will be safe if we return to school on 1st June. I have attached a short summary of both surveys so that you can get an idea of the responses.

Parent/ Carer Responses

There were 325 (out of 405 possible) responses, that is 80% across both schools. Of those, 26% said 'yes' to allowing their child to return to school in June and 34% in July, and of these percentages, the majority are key worker families. Almost all of these responses were followed by some questions around social distancing, PPE and a need for clarity from the government that they have evidence that this is a safe move at this point in time. 74% of Parents said they would like to wait for the new academic year (September) for their child to return to school.

The majority of parents feel that children are unable to socially distance and that trying to enforce this would lead to upset and confusion, although it was acknowledged that at some point we will need to get back to 'normality'. You feel that this is not possible right now, with too many uncertainties. Many parents expressed concern for their wider family and for staff and their families if children were to return to school in the coming weeks. These concerns cannot be underestimated as the government is still unclear in its response to questions around children being carriers of the Covid-19 and the risks to adults if schools return.

Staff Responses

There were 49 (out of 51) responses, that is 96% across both schools. All staff who have no underlying health conditions have said they are available to return to work if it is safe to do so, and they are all missing the children very much. Like Parents, they want things to return to normal but are also very worried for their own safety and the safety of our children and their families. Staff are not confident that there is enough evidence from the Government or from models in other countries to prove that they will be safe at work if they returned without PPE or proper distancing guidelines. I also share these concerns.

The assurances requested by the parents and staff of the Federation are ones that we are currently risk assessing but are unable to make at this point in time. We have ever changing DfE guidance which does little to allay the genuine worries of the school community. The differing advice given to schools and all other work places is hard to comprehend. More clarity is needed before it is safe to open the school to more pupils, with time to carefully plan this.

Going forward:

The school is working towards partial reopening in the summer term, as per the current Government guidance, but only if the scientific key indicators tell us it is safe to do so. **However, due to the limited time we have to plan and risk assess, we will not be in a position to open to pupils on the 1st June other than for children of key workers.** We are working on a plan which would aim to reopen in the weeks that follow in small steps, subject to a number of factors, the greatest of which is the safety of all. Until adequate safety measures are in place and risk assessed we will not be able to open the schools.

We aim to have all children back for a period of time in the summer term. We will not necessarily be following the order that the government have published. We need to make our plan for our schools based on what is safe for our community.

Please note: the decision to send your child to school if and when we reopen in the summer term still lies completely with Parents. You can choose not to send your child to school until September, if you feel it is unsafe to do so, and you will not be fined.

For the school to reopen in the summer term, we would need to introduce many new procedures:

- We plan to stagger the opening and closing times of the school day for different classes or groups
- The school timetables would be altered significantly and most usual activities would not take place in their usual format: lessons, playtimes, lunchtimes, school assemblies, small reading groups
- Children would not necessarily be taught in their usual classroom groups or by their usual teacher / teaching assistant due to staff availability, the need for smaller groupings and the need to continue to cater for keyworker children
- Parents/ Carers would not be permitted in the school building or on the school premises without an appointment
- Hot school meals would not currently be available; all pupils would need to bring a packed lunch
- The Breakfast and Afterschool clubs would remain closed for the time being, until a safe time for us to start them up again

I am in constant discussions with Staff, Governors and Senior leaders, the Diocese and Lambeth Education, as well as taking into account Parent and Staff feedback, and monitoring government guidance. I thank you for your support and trust in the leadership and governance of our schools to make the right decision for the school community. At this present time, with the information I have to hand, I believe the best decision is not to rush this.

We want to make sure that when the children do come back to school it is as safe as possible, but also that it is a positive experience for everyone. The mental well-being of pupils, staff and families continues to be of the utmost importance to us and I believe that we need to plan carefully to get this right.

We need to make sure that children have an opportunity to have closure on their current year, but also begin to look forward to the year ahead knowing that they have been supported through this. For Year 6, we aim to support their transition to Secondary School and for other year groups we want them to have a period of transition to their new year groups, if at all possible.

Please do not worry about your children 'falling behind' in their education. Every child in the country is trying to learn at home. Our teachers have worked extremely hard in setting up a learning platform online so that children can continue their learning at home. Teachers know that children always need lots of catching up after a summer break, so we are used to doing this after every break in education. It is our job to teach them, to help them to catch up, to fill any gaps they have. It's what we do all of the time and it will be no different when we return to a full school routine. You are doing an amazing job at home - children have learned so many life skills, do not underestimate this.

While we make plans for reopening, we will continue to phone our families, respond to weekly emails you send to school email addresses and set Home Learning tasks. We will continue to provide FSM vouchers to those families entitled to this provision.

We will also continue to provide childcare for key worker children. If you believe that you may be entitled to access this provision, please get in touch with us.

I know that some parents want and need to get back to work and while I appreciate this, the safety of the school community remains my priority.

We will be in touch after half term, when we have had more time to plan, to risk assess, to hopefully gather answers to some of the questions that remain unanswered. We also aim to produce some documents which should hopefully make families and staff feel clearer about how we can all get back to school safely, while ensuring that we remain available as a childcare setting for our key worker families.

Thank you for your continued concern for the school community and support for the leadership of the school. You continue to be in our thoughts and prayers.

Warmest Regards,

Ewa Ostrynska
Federation Headteacher