

Kindness and Co-operation	Thankfulness	Friendship and Sharing	Respect	Patience and Perseverance	Responsibility
Hope and Peace	Unity	Trust and Honesty	Happiness	Courage	



MAPLE TREE
PRIMARY SCHOOL

Climbing the branches of success

Newsletter

Monday 18th May 2020

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD

I hope you are keeping safe and well and am sorry this did not get to you on Friday and also apologise in advance for what is likely to be a lengthy newsletter for you to read this week. With so much speculation doing the rounds following the government announcement that schools should reopen on 1st June (providing the science says it is safe to do so), I wanted to address issues with you in an effort to be completely transparent as well as keeping you informed with the facts.

As a school, we have no prior knowledge before receiving Government guidelines - we receive it the same time as everyone else - and so we are all trying to work to the guidance that has been suggested. Over the past week there has been information drip fed to schools about what we should be doing to enable school to reopen safely yet there is still a huge amount of concern within our school community about how we manage to do this safely for all - pupils, families and staff. I am incredibly grateful to you all for taking the time to respond to the parent survey I sent out last week. We had a staggering 191 responses which is far greater than any other questionnaire we have sent out and shows the depth of feeling that you have at this current time. I will share the more detailed responses with you later on in this letter but with 60% of responses showing that you do not feel comfortable or confident in sending your children in to school at the moment it quite clearly shows that there are serious concerns surrounding these decisions. To be honest with you, I also have concerns.

The plans that have been shared with us so far include, splitting children up into small teaching groups (referred to as a 'bubble' – same adult and same children at all times), staggered starts to the day and staggered finish times to avoid congestion at the school gates and one adult only dropping off and collecting. We are being asked to clean surfaces continuously throughout the day, wear PPE for First Aid and set out classrooms for social distancing, avoiding contact with children and between children. I can tell you quite honestly that there is no such thing as social distancing in a school – we can try but we certainly cannot guarantee it. The reason childhood illnesses spread in a school is because we are all in contact with each other! We know that children can be at either end of the room, or in different classrooms, and still the germs will be shared because that is what schools are like.

Given the massive implications there are for opening school I have choices - I can open the school quickly, I can open the school safely. I am not sure that I can do both at once. Given the level of planning and changes to the school environment that need to be put in place in order to reduce the risk of infection to staff, children and you at home, we may not be able to do this for all the recognised year groups on 1st June and even then it would not be for all the chosen year groups at the same time. The phased return applies to children of key workers from all year groups, Pre-school, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 only. If they all return we would have well in excess of 200 children in school and a large number of staff. It is up to schools to decide what is safe and manageable and I can tell you now that this isn't.

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At the moment, therefore, our plan is to stagger the groups of children we have in, with the Keyworker children being the group who will return on 1st June. The guidance found [here](#) from the Government indicates the roles that make someone a key worker. I would ask you all to read through this and make sure it definitely applies to you. If it does then you need to contact the school at info@mapletreepriamaryschool.com and we will contact you to ask you for evidence/rota to show your working expectations. Once we are confident that criteria has been met then we can welcome your child to the priority group - providing spaces and staffing is available.

I will also be contacting parents of children in our Mulberries Pre-school today to find out how many children would be needing to come back and our aim will be to have them start on Wednesday 3rd June. This is to allow time to ensure that any safety measures we have in place can cope with additional children. Should there then still be spaces, parents of children in Reception will be contacted, and then Year 1 and then Year 6. This will only happen if we can facilitate the groups but this will be bound by the number of available staff and spare classrooms that I have. **Please do not tell you children they are coming back to school on 1st June until this has been confirmed with you.** Some of them may have a later start date that week, as our aim will be to allow them back when we are satisfied that our safety measures will allow us to do so, and some may not be able to return at this time if we are in a position where we have to prioritise due to number of places requested.

I am sure this is not what you were expecting at all from the headlines recently but every single piece of guidance states that in order to ensure safety for all in our community - and that very much includes you as parents too - priority should be given to groups of children and the order is that which I have set out above - priority groups of keyworker children, pre-school children, Reception children, Year 1 and Year 6.

I am sure this will cause much frustration within our school community as it is not as simple as just reopening the school building. Do I want the children and staff all back in school? Of course I do. Are you at the end of your tether at home? Quite likely. However, I am not going to write and tell you we can achieve social distancing and guarantee total safety in a school. We can always make things safer, we could perhaps reduce the risk slightly but as soon as lots of children return, I can tell you that the risk will be there.

There will be more information coming home to parents of these year groups this week about what this might actually look like in the classroom but it is a lot to get our heads around at the moment and certainly is unlike anything we have had to manage before. There is still further guidance expected and plans we currently have may well be subject to change which is why I am asking you to be patient with us whilst we move forwards.

I am sorry if this sounds negative, that is not my intention at all and I hope you can understand the level of difficulty this presents but it is vital so that we can at least try to minimise the risks. I do want to assure you that every member of staff at Maple Tree is committed to having the children back and care very much about them, especially as we cannot see them right now. You, our families, are also very much on our minds and we so desperately want to be back to 'normal' so we can be supporting your family way of life too but we are not there yet.

Please look out for the surveys which will be sent out today and tomorrow to relevant year groups and respond as soon as possible. The numbers who want to return are needed before we can plan further, the keyworker/vulnerable group will remain as it is. I also need to be clear that it is ONLY pre-school, Year R, 1 and 6 being considered – if you have children in other years they CANNOT return at this phase.

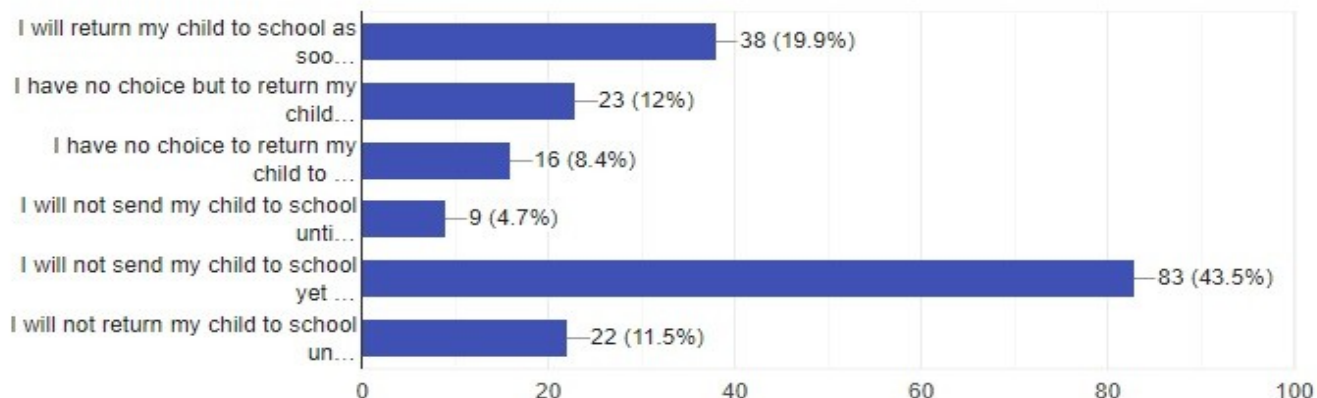
Should you have children in these year groups and decide that you wish for your child to stay at home, that is absolutely fine and I assure you I will totally understand and respect that. The Government have made it clear that there will be no penalty for non-attendance if you feel your child is still safest at home.

Below is a further breakdown of responses that came from the Covid-19 Parent survey that was sent out last week. That has now closed so no more responses will be counted but I am really grateful to you all for the time taken and also for the helpful suggestions that you gave us for consideration too.

There was a good spread of responses across all year groups.

Please tick the option that best reflects your feeling at this time.

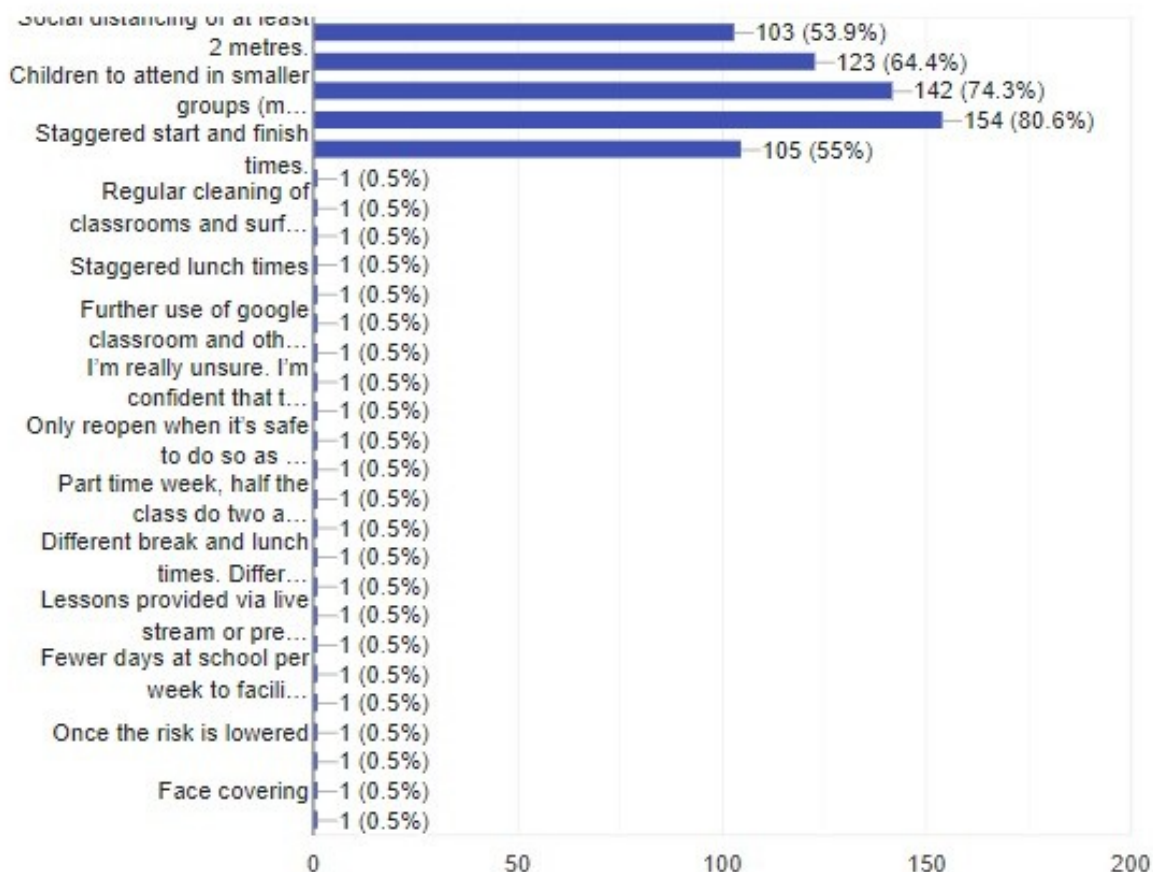
191 responses



There were some great suggestions here such as fewer days in school to enable fewer children in school each week to minimise the risk, have different breaktimes and lunchtimes, further use of Google Classroom and other technology, half day attendance etc, All of your suggestions have been taken on board and are being given careful consideration.

In order to ensure safety for children and adults, please indicate which methods you feel would be appropriate for our school setting.

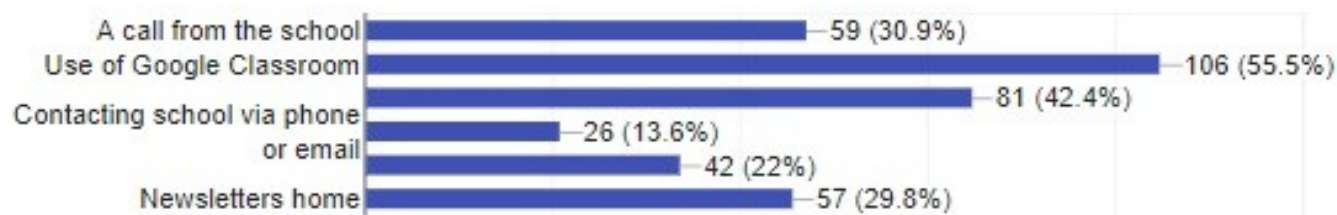
191 responses



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What has been the most effective support during school closure?

191 responses



With regards to question 3, which was all about support that you have found effective whilst school has been closed, we have been really grateful for your feedback. Our introduction of Google Classroom has been very positive and is lovely to see it develop. It has also been good to see that, largely, our phone calls home have also been well received. There were a lot of other things that you mentioned which were positive such as access to TT Rockstars etc and having the ability to communicate with staff via email or Google Classroom and then there were some suggestions for us to take on board to help us to move forwards.

We are sorry that the first two weeks a number of you felt left to your own devices. Though we had loaded a lot of work onto the website to support you we were all getting new guidance and having to deal with new ways of working. Training staff to be virtual teachers overnight when not in school has not been without difficulty and I want to congratulate all our amazing staff for the hard work they continue to put in. It is not easy for them having to juggle working from home with their own families either and every single staff member has stepped up to play their part to help create a virtual school at this time. I am proud of all their achievements and want to share that with you given there are some particularly negative messages in the media at the moment. We are all learning as we go along, there is no rule book and we do what we can and as we say to the children, 'there is *always* room for improvement'! All I would ask is that you maintain contact with us too either through the office@ or homelearning@ emails so that we can help you with the support that you need.

Again, I must apologise for the length of this newsletter, it has not been an easy one to write but I really want to be open and honest with you about the fear and concerns that lie within the Maple Tree community, but please know that I take solace from the fact that we remain positive that there **will** be an end to this and we will all be reunited, when it is safest to do so. There is every chance that plans will change over the coming days and they are, of course, subject to revision in light of any pandemic developments over the coming weeks but I will continue to update you.

