



Recovery, Development and Improvement Planning July 2020 – Document 1

Statement of Intent

Our intention is to open in September as a whole school bubble, but with classes operating as independent bubbles within the whole school structure as far as reasonably possible and practicable. Promoting the physical and mental wellbeing of all stakeholders will be our priority at all times. The rationale behind this intention is summarised below. To mitigate against risk, the government’s hierarchy of measures will be followed, and contact between adults will be minimised both inside and outside of school as far as we can control and encourage.

Rationale 1 – School Ethos and Vision

I am a headteacher because I am passionate about education. My particular interest is in child psychology and classroom pedagogy – how children learn and how to get the best out of them. I would therefore never want to be the headteacher of a school where children did not have the freedom to learn, play or interact naturally with their peers, nor would I want to prevent staff from comforting, intervening or supporting a child by sitting next to them if they judged it to be the right thing to do, and felt safe and comfortable doing so. I consider it to be completely hypocritical that schools are on the one hand being told to ensure gaps in learning are closed, and to prioritise elements of the curriculum that we all know benefit from a 1:1 “up close and personal” approach; “...ensure that all pupils are ... given the catch-up support needed to make substantial progress by the end of the academic year... For pupils in key stages 1 and 2, school leaders are expected to prioritise... good progress in the essentials (phonics and reading, increasing vocabulary, writing and mathematics.)” (*Guidance for full opening, DfE, 2nd July 2020*) if staff are not allowed to interact and teach in the way in which they are accustomed.

Similarly, how can we promote a child’s mental health and well-being if school has turned into a completely different place to the one they remembered? If, “returning to school is vital for children’s education and for their wellbeing” (*Guidance for full opening, DfE, 2nd July 2020*), then I would argue that school needs to be a place that is familiar, safe and meets children’s expectations based on their prior experience – their well-being will never be promoted in an environment that is sterile, and where both teachers and pupils are scared of saying and doing the wrong thing. It’s back to the basics of Maslow – something which we, at Elton, focus on at the start of every year and return to throughout the year, but which seems particularly pertinent and relevant now.

Secondly, at Elton, every parent is aware and understands that we are keen promoters of HSE guidance, they effectively sign up to it by sending their child to school here; namely that children only learn about risk by being exposed to it and by being taught how to deal with it. That’s why Y6 know they have to check that the oven isn’t hot as they walk past it to get to their classroom upstairs, why children are allowed to bring nuts into school even though we have children with life-threatening allergies, why children learn how to cross the “road” to our field (under supervision) as soon as they arrive. In my opinion, we are doing our children absolutely no favours whatsoever by micro-managing their every move and doing things for them. This merely encourages a culture of dependence, and adds to mental anxiety and stress (for both pupils and teachers). By wrapping children in cotton wool, they are being taught that there is something very dangerous out there, and that it is something that they are not equipped to deal with themselves; they need a “grown-up” to do

things for them. I completely disagree with this approach, and feel that it is simply creating a massive problem for the future of our children, and for society in general. It is our job as educators to teach children how to equip **themselves** with the skills they need for life. It goes back to the water-safety theory – there’s no point telling children that water is dangerous and that they need to stay away from it; they need to be taught how to be safe in and near it, how to respect it, how to swim in it and how to save lives, including their own.

Therefore, we need to teach children how to live safely with Covid-19 whilst it’s with us (it could be with us a while), and how to minimise its risk and threat. After all, without a vaccine, this may well be one of those life-long skills prized in the returning to school guidance, “[all pupils receive a high-quality education that promotes their development and prepares them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.](#)” (*Guidance for full opening, DfE, 2nd July 2020*) Independent and compassionate citizens, problem-solvers, children who think outside the box... this is what we want an education at Elton to give our children.

Rationale 2 – Physical Constraints

- Our school is in a small village at the end of a dead-end, one-track lane. We can’t have a one-way system in place for parents dropping off and picking up.
- The building is largely Victorian, and of the classrooms housing the 6 classes, only one meets the recommended ratio for space v pupils. (LA’s Penny Price can confirm this)
- We are oversubscribed – as I write this, I’ve just received another email from the LA asking me to admit over PAN, despite them knowing about our physical limitations.
- The corridors are, at their widest, less than 2m, and even less than 1m at their most narrow. Excluding EYFS (which is self-contained) there is only one set of boys’ and one set of girls’ toilets in the school – the narrow corridors must therefore be navigated by all.
- The lay-out of just one classroom in the school promotes the DfE’s “desks facing forwards” suggestion. We do not have regularly proportioned rooms. For the other 5, there will be some inevitable face to face/group seating – anything different is logistically impossible: the size and lay-out of the classrooms demands this. I could also argue that good pedagogy, self and peer-assessment and flexible teaching approaches that enable teachers to “[prioritise identifying gaps and re-establish good progress](#)” (*Guidance for full opening, DfE, 2nd July 2020*) demands this too.
- The main cloakroom is next to the toilets and will therefore be accessed by all pupils in Y1-6.
- Year 6 are housed in the converted “School House”, a small house, adjoining the school. There are no corridors in this part of the school – entrance is through the kitchen. The 2 rooms downstairs are the only “spare” teaching spaces within the school (allocated for a dedicated PP teacher, or 1:1/group interventions) and the upstairs is converted into a classroom for Y6. The whole School House (upstairs and downstairs) is used by the breakfast and after school club for wrap around care so that the rest of the school is clear and can therefore be cleaned effectively. Groups cannot therefore be physically kept completely separate from the spaces allocated to other bubbles. This is acknowledged by the guidance. “[The use of small groups restricts the normal operation of schools and presents both educational and logistical challenges, including the cleaning and use of shared spaces... and the provision of specialist teaching](#)”. (*Guidance for full opening, DfE, July 2nd 2020*)
- One classroom (formerly a small library area) does not have a sink, therefore the children in this class will need access to the main toilets throughout the day for handwashing.

Logistically therefore, we neither have the physical space nor resources inside the building to **guarantee** that all bubbles will remain separate throughout the day or that there will be no contact points in common. The building layout quite simply does not allow it. If forced to accommodate this, I would be removing staff from teaching duties; this would be going against implementing a

system which, “works for (our) school, and allows (us) to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum for (our) pupils, including full educational and care support for those pupils who have SEND” (*Guidance to full opening, DfE, 2nd July 2020*) and therefore a system which goes against government guidance. However we will do our utmost to ensure that, where practically possible, children in different classes will be kept apart whilst inside the school buildings, promote a culture of excellent personal hygiene, and carry out extra cleaning throughout the day to keep everybody as safe as we possibly can.

Rationale 3 – Pupil mixing, bubble “logistics”

- Currently, there are 142 children on roll in our school.
- There are 100 families.
- If we maintained class bubbles throughout the entire day (including drop off, toilet breaks, breaktimes, lunchtimes and home-times) 80 children would already be “compromised” regardless, and be compromising the security of their bubble as a result of having a sibling in a different bubble.
- 42 children have siblings at other primary schools or secondary schools, thereby again giving opportunity for the bubble to be compromised.
- Only 6 children are only children in the school– those not included above have siblings who attend pre-schools, nurseries and child-minders.
- 16 parents work at other schools in different bubbles
- The parents of 15 other children work in front-line “high-risk” jobs (NHS/police).
- The school bus serves 28 children to and from school.
- Interest in before/after school club is currently for over 30 children.
- Outside school, many children from different year groups attend the same privately-run clubs and are in different bubbles than they would be at school. For example, many of our children attend a gym club. As part of that club’s risk assessment – all the children from our school (regardless of year group) will be in the same bubble, separate from other schools, but mixed within our school bubble. This is replicated in the intentions and re-opening plans of local football and performing arts groups too.

Therefore, we know that children (through siblings, transport, ASC) will be mixing anyway. We do not have the staff to ensure that every year group is kept apart from all the others throughout the day, without seriously compromising the quality and breadth of the curriculum/catch-up/after-school provision we can offer. We would achieve very little throughout the day other than clean hands and queuing for lunch! By the very nature of their make-up, children in different class bubbles will mingle at either end of the school day (school bus, after-school club, siblings). Enforcing their complete separation during the 20 mins of breaktime and 30 mins of outdoor play at lunch, would put huge amounts of pressure on staff, increase their workload, be detrimental to staff morale/team spirit etc and for what purpose? We can only control what we can control. Control measures 1-4 will be followed stringently, and we will do our best to minimise greater contact between individuals (measure 5) throughout the school day as outlined below.

Groups, “should be kept apart from other groups where possible” (*Guidance for full opening, DfE, 2nd July 2020*). Class bubbles will be maintained throughout class teaching time. For the first half term, class teachers will remain with their class (if full time) rather than teaching their specialisms in the afternoons. Children will eat in their class bubble (where possible outside, but if not, because of weather, then inside). Individuals will have their own named supply of stationery in class (if age appropriate), year group bubbles will have their own resources in class, and as during phase 3, be encouraged to manage risk independently (cleaning their own resources, supervised spot cleaning of their desks and tables etc). Bubbles may mix at breaktimes and lunchtimes, therefore we cannot say

class bubbles will remain completely exclusive. However, children generally choose to play with friends from their own class, or mix with their siblings or friends who they live near or attend clubs with after school. The level of risk of a child infecting another child from a different year group during 20 mins of outdoor breaktime, or 30 mins of outdoor lunch play, is therefore similar to the level of risk of a child being infected from a sibling interaction, being taken for a meal in a pub at the weekend, meeting grandparents, attending a privately-run after-school club, shopping at Primark etc ... all factors outside our control. We can only control what we can control.

I am well aware that the down-side of having a whole school bubble would be that with two confirmed cases, the whole school might be asked to close. However, with the overlap of children (siblings/bus/after-school club) it is highly likely that even if we were able to keep class bubbles completely separate from each other throughout the day, confirmed cases in one class would lead to parents keeping their own children off school by association anyway. Eg “child X catches the school bus and so does a child in my own child’s class, so I’m going to keep my child and his sibling off school until they are tested.” Or “they all use the same toilets, so I’m not confident that only that class is affected no matter what school says - I’m going to keep my 2 children off.”

On the positive side, if the school was asked to close due to positive cases, it would be much easier for teachers to manage and continue high quality teaching and deliver an excellent education. It is impossible to do two jobs – to be the teacher with a class inside school, and to simultaneously teach online lessons and give feedback, without it being detrimental to a teacher’s mental health and well-being, and therefore to the quality of education provision on offer.

Being a whole-school bubble gives us much greater control and an overview of safety which we are all much happier with. Responsibility is collective rather than down to the individual, and will alleviate pressure and stress. We will be able to identify potential areas of concern, and be proactive, rather than reactive, by discussing them in our daily debriefing meetings. Working as a small, whole-school team with the measures identified in our risk assessment will ensure that our school is a safer place to be, rather than ask individuals to be fully responsible for every one of their children throughout every minute of the school day. I anticipate that schools attempting to keep class bubbles completely separate will not be able to sustain this approach without compromising on the quality and breadth of education on offer, or on the wellbeing of their staff.

I’m more than ready to change my mind if I think things aren’t going as well as they should - a strength of all the staff here is a willingness and an ability to be flexible and to adapt to everchanging needs. Another huge strength of this school is open and transparent communication; parents, staff, governors and children are more than confident enough to give me honest feedback, and I’m confident enough in my relationship with them to listen and to change things when they need changing. How things will work in any school is unknown at the moment, but with the knowledge we have of our school, its values, context and community, we are confident that our proposed return to school plan is our best starting point.