



CEO Briefing

SCHOOL YEAR 2019/20
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I'd like to start this briefing by saying a huge **thank you** to all those who completed our inaugural Employee Opinion Survey. Results are currently being analyzed, and once I have something to share I'll ensure this is issued as a priority.

It's been a real privilege over the past two weeks to get around all of our academies and see so many children and staff back in school. Our approach throughout these challenging times has been the same as always: we plan for each school community individually and do the right thing on an academy-by-academy basis. The tricky part for many in the state education sector has been agreeing on what "the right thing" is.

The headline of "all schools are closing their gates" was just plain wrong. Thousands of schools in England have stayed open since 23 March. All special schools have been expected to continue to offer provision where a family have wanted their child to attend, as a child has the legal right to what's in their Education, Health & Care Plan. Equally, the expectation that all schools still welcome vulnerable pupils means so many of the national schools workforce have continued to come to work every day, with so many more learners being supported online. That's been the case across our MAT and is very much the opposite of being closed!

Some schools have taken the decision to not open during this time despite the Government's ask, and some Councils haven't helped by issuing local advice based on local interpretation and politics. Some Councils have even made statements that give the false impression they have the power to order schools to close. They do not. I believe what we've needed is consistency, not a post code lottery, and some of these local differences have made things a lot more confusing for children, families and staff. Unnecessarily so.

The only reason any of our academy sites have closed has been because no parents have wanted a place, and it would have been unnecessary to ask staff to attend a school without pupils. After the change in Government expectations from 1 June, more parents have asked for their children to attend, which means we've had to respond to increased demand. I expect this increase to continue over the next few weeks, and at the same time I also expect Government guidance to continue to change. After 10 weeks of relative consistency, we're now back to where we were in the early months of 2020, with changes to Government policy coming weekly, if not daily.

I couldn't be prouder of the way our Governors, our Headteachers and our workforce have behaved during these unprecedented times. When there have been so many reasons for there to be division and disagreement, I've been so heartened by the trust and the compassion I've witnessed. Across our country, people have reacted to the Coronavirus measures in different ways. Naturally, some people have experienced things differently, as everyone's personal circumstances are different. When we return to a more recognisable normal, we really need to consider how we celebrate the unity we've shown and the child-focus we've maintained at a time when so many others have not.

Learning together, to be the best we can be

Warren Carratt

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