



Operational Return to School Action Plan

It is quite possible, that the past few months have been the most stressful many of us have ever experienced in our careers in education and our lives. I am immensely proud of the way we have come together as a staff (this is also evident in the SDP questionnaires). The dedication of the teams working in school and those who have been working at home, is evident across the community. The relationships with our children and their families has really shone through and the number of positive comments has been quite overwhelming.

Considerations	Action
<p>Schools have not been shut We have had on average 15-20 children in school each day from our vulnerable and key workers. 3 week rotas to try and ensure opportunities for social distancing. BF, NS, LT, SS, AB and RD in school every week; JA working at home and school. 1` staff have been shielding: RR, KT, DW, TM, LM, ED, GB, AS, LG, IH and PJ. Some have continued to work at home.</p> <p>Staff are going to start tired and this will impact on their ability to lead, manage and respond to change. Emotional support may also be needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure staff meetings are an opportunity to focus on wellbeing of staff and discuss any children of concern. • Staff are expected to spend the first few weeks back assessing the children’s academic, social and emotional needs through running open creative activities, talking, playing and enjoying the broad curriculum such as PE, Music, Art/ DT and topic. Including personalised emotional/social support for children. This will not need a vast amount of planning for and, again, minimise workload for teachers. • All staff must be given time to talk about their own experiences at home and any support we can offer (how and when?)
<p>Support for staff As a school community, we will need to support our staff, including those who have experienced loss and trauma. Some will have been in school without a real break throughout the crisis, while others may have been working exclusively from home. Others will not have been working at all. We need to allow ourselves time to rebuild and reform our school communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors will need to focus on the wellbeing of staff over the first half term particularly. • The newest accurate data will not be available until December. Many children will not have moved forward in their learning and it will take time to recover. • The focus will be on assessing children, supporting children and creating the correct healthy environment so that when children are ready to learn, they will fly. • Governors must accept there will be some ‘feeling our way’ based on what we know about how children learn and our families. • Governors will need to ensure all their communication with staff is relating to children’s and adult’s wellbeing during the Autumn term. • The return to school could potentially see many new disclosures to deal with for key safeguarding staff, stressed and emotional parents and this will take a lot of time as well as cause emotional upset for the staff.
<p>Don’t pretend that everything is normal For many, the return to school will be greeted with a huge sigh of relief and we will want to pretend that the world is returning to how it was, but we will all have been changed by the experience of Corona.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actioned during Staff meetings and assemblies. All staff and children will be reminded that we will take our time to return to ‘normal’ and it will be done in a holistic way dependent upon the level of trauma. If we acknowledge the huge historical event we lived through and report that

<p>It will take time for us to adjust to the 'new' normal. We will need to recognise and allow for this by being kind to each other and ourselves.</p>	<p>we can allow ourselves to blend back in to normal when ready. This will be reviewed daily by SLT and weekly by all staff.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a major focus on wellbeing, children will hit the ground running when they are ready and make up the lost learning relatively quickly as evidenced in other countries. • Trauma, such as this, halts learning as it disconnects us from coping and love. We need to spend time rebuilding relationships with children in school and ensure that they know they are loved. This will take place before any learning is successful.
<p>Re-establishing routines For many the re-establishment of routines will be difficult. This will not just be for school routines; it will also be for those basic daily life routines, such as sleep and getting up. We know that this is difficult and a source of anxiety at the beginning of every term, but this will be on a larger scale. We will need to allow a period of adjustment and be aware of the impact of trying to re-establish these routines for staff, parents and children. We will need to re-learn the rhythm of the school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Routine being put in place swiftly gives children a sense of comfort. However, some families may struggle and it is important for the school to acknowledge this and offer help where needed. • Children will be very tired (as will staff) by the afternoon, so the timetable will need to account for this and be organised for more open activities. • Children will have been eating at very odd times and may be more hungry – we could provide snacks for morning break in KS2 as we do in KS1 until their eating patterns return to normal. • A chance for children to talk will be timetabled to ensure that their transition is comfortable and meets their needs, as well as physical tasks in the morning to support their physical well-being. • Children will need to be welcomed back to a school that has many opportunities to explore and play. This may include more breaks, time to disengage and specified areas in which children can go to 'feel safe'.
<p>Re-establishing expectations Different people will have had very different experiences during the lockdown. Some will have been in school throughout, though for them school will have been a very different place. The majority of children will have been at home and each of them will have had their own experience. It will take time to re-establish and re-learn the expectations of school behaviour and learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key is re-establishing behaviour expectations, how we speak to each other, how we treat each other and our attitude to being in school. The learning will happen when this is all established. • Daily visits to each class by the Headteacher to remind them all is well, will create a safe environment, reminding them they are loved and cared for. • Children are thereby reminded of respect for each other, love for each other and what that looks like again, thus re-creating our ethos and culture. • Children to be constantly reminded that we are here to help. It only takes one emotionally available adult to make a difference to many children. • Expectations take into consideration the impact of Corona and it is important that we don't just 'move on'. It is a fresh start but the impact on many children is significant and this needs to be addressed over a period of time.
<p>Differences in learning There will be a huge range in what learning children have engaged in while not in school. We will need to respond to what children have learnt, not what we expected them to have learnt and what they have forgotten.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessing learning: we will do this informally. To restart children's schooling with formal testing, will mitigate any focus on re-building relationships and exacerbate the anxieties about restarting formal schooling. • It will be more important to value and celebrate what children have learnt. Teachers to spend time allowing the children to 'show and tell' what they have been doing, what they have learned and what their lives have been like over the lockdown. We can then assess them academically as well as socially and emotionally.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children given the chance to bring things that they have done and celebrate successes during our time away. • Teachers' responses will be key to how children are able to reintegrate into school and the people that they will become.
<p>Exclusion Successfully accessing learning at home depends on many factors. For the majority of children, learning will depend on the role of parent as 'teacher'. This depends on parental skills, interest and commitment. It is further impacted by the parents' work commitments, educational and language levels. Further there are issues of space to learn, as well as access to physical and online resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some children may feel they have missed out. We must acknowledge that this may not have been their fault that they did not manage to carry out much 'learning'. • How have children shown resilience, patience and kindness at home? So as not to discriminate against the children who have not been able to do much work online. • We need to provide opportunities for children to 're-attach' at all levels, this will predominately work through opportunities to share and play. • Designated staff on hand to provide bespoke support for children in need. This may not necessarily mean RD, BF, LT, JA. More the person who makes them feel the most comfortable in school.
<p>Difference between those who have been on site and those who have not There will be significant differences for children who have and have not been on the school site during the lock down. It would be wrong to assume that those who have been in school are OK. We need to remember that these are our most vulnerable families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ensure we use their experience to highlight to children that it is safe in school, as long as we wash our hands, keep some distance and use a tissue to sneeze or cough. • These children may play a key part in the promotional video for other children returning to school? A mini IT project? • Children who have been on site will have made new friends who they now have to part from. Speak with the children and see if they want to keep contact.
<p>Safeguarding Domestic Abuse We will need to be vigilant about children who have experienced abuse during the lock down. Some children will have suffered significant harm during this time. We need to be aware of this as a possibility for all our children, not just the ones we had identified as vulnerable.</p> <p>Online abuse We need to be aware of the threats and possible abuse that children may have experienced online during this time.</p> <p>Online bullying As the lock down has forced more and more of children's social lives to move online, we need to be aware of the increased risk of online peer on peer abuse.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dedicate the first half term to creating a safe environment for all children and allow them many regular opportunities to talk about their experiences. • We will need to ensure that children have safe spaces to talk about their experiences and trusted adults who will listen to them and are ready to respond to them effectively. This will be 1:1, small group sessions and whole class. • All staff to receive a safeguarding briefing on how to respond to disclosures on return to school. • It may take a long time for children to reveal any abuse. They may communicate it through behaviour and other indicators, rather than through disclosure. All staff need to be aware of this and be able to respond appropriately and immediately.
<p>Bereavement It is essential that we are clear with children who has died and who has not returned to our setting for some other reason- house moves, job changes, parents deciding to continue with home education, etc. This will need to be discussed, or children and social media will build up rumours and stories that will be neither helpful or healthy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a school family we are transparent about any changes that have occurred. This can be within class setting where necessary or during assembly. • The school will take time to look at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ how many people recovered from the illness due to the skills and care of the NHS ○ the money that was raised to support them ○ the encouragement given by the nation (clapping) and find a way to let them know how thankful we are.

<p>Even for those who have not experienced a death in their family or community, any illness will become a greater source of anxiety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support provided to children and family around loss and of those who have suffered directly or indirectly from the virus. • Take part in, 'I wish my teacher knew' sessions to discuss important events during lockdown. Using virtual hugs and other methods to make children smile and feel comfortable.
<p>Sensory needs Many children will be looking forward to the return to school, but will find being around people difficult, frightening and overwhelming. Having experienced weeks, or even months, of social distancing, children will have received an implicit message that other people are dangerous. Further, their experience of other people, beyond their immediate family, within their personal space will have been limited. For many the hustle and bustle, movement and number of people in school will be difficult.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is imperative that there is control when walking, gathering etc. Calm and orderly, quiet where necessary, but always quiet space available. Many children will be used to quiet now and alone time and may crave it. Staff to use intervention rooms and hall for separating children out, creating small calm group work. • Children will be made aware and should speak with a member of staff if they feel they need some down time. • Many children have not been in a room with more than a few people for months and life has probably been very quiet, so the classroom will seem very noisy. Staff must ensure the level of noise is kept low where possible, but where it is not, then always reminding children where the quiet spaces are. • Children have the chance to receive sensory breaks, explore their new surroundings and play to reduce stress. We will focus on the 'small wows'. • Children must have the chance to reflect and this may be as a class, one on one or with a special friend. This may not happen immediately and needs to be available on an ongoing basis.
<p>Separation anxieties The majority of children will have become used to being with their parents and immediate family for an extended period. Even for those who are excited to regain their freedom and see their friends, this is a potential source of anxiety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many children separate from their families easily every day, but in normal circumstances some do not. Staff know who those children are, however, now there may be many more who do not want to leave their family, because: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ They can keep their family safe if they are with them ○ They can see that the family are ok if they stay home ○ They will miss them ○ They don't want to be surrounded by lots of people ○ They don't want the stress of formal learning again <p>Staff will constantly reassure the children that their family are safe, working, shopping etc just as we would when a child shows these anxieties. Staff can call parents midday to check in. For children particularly distressed we can arrange for children/parent to talk in the middle of the day.</p>
<p>Special needs The impact of all these issues will be even greater for those with special needs. Their learning will have been impacted, as will issues of being or not being in school, managing change, routines and anxieties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For most of our SEND children, the biggest hurdle will be the expectations of behaviour, establishing routine again and reassuring them that all is ok. • We will need to use the visual timetable every morning to reassure the children how the day will look. • The class will need excellent behaviour management using positive reinforcement as many children will have forgotten how to behave (shouting out, talking over each other, poor language). • Children will not remember how to behave immediately and may take a couple of weeks to get those good habits back, so patience will be a virtue! • Constantly reinforce expectations and establish class rules.

Relationships

Key to all of this is going to be re-building relationships. We need to be aware that this will not happen overnight. We need to give ourselves time and be kind.

- Ensure all playing is supervised and scaffolded, at every opportunity remind children how we play together, compromise, share and work together just as we did before. Make sure you are interacting with the children during playtimes, not standing talking in groups.
- Take time to remind the children how we do things at Birkwood, helping them to regain that identity and the culture and ethos that comes with it.
- Rewards used all the time to positively promote the characteristics we seek to see.
- Some children will have reverted back to more childish behaviour and we ask that staff are patient with this and remind the children how we speak at school without reprimand.

Remember our motto is:

‘Inspire, Cherish and Achieve together.’

