

Statement regarding school reopening

Since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, schools have exercised civic leadership with quiet determination.

We have remained open for the children of key workers: a collective effort that has allowed frontline staff to continue working and thus prevented the nation from grinding to a halt.

We have invited vulnerable children and those with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) to attend school in an attempt to safeguard them. Despite our encouragement, the uptake of places by children in the social care system has been alarmingly low, which in itself is a significant cause for concern.

At short notice, we have reconfigured into community hubs to support the execution of local authorities' civil contingency plans, through which we have played a significant role in supporting disadvantaged families. We have delivered food parcels in addition to delivering education. We have taught online lessons and provided exhaustive study packs. We have kept in continual contact with pupils through telephone calls and doorstep visits.

We have worked with the creativity, vigour and optimism which are characteristic of the sector.

We know that this is not enough.

For any child, prolonged absence from school is concerning academically and socially. For disadvantaged pupils, it is calamitous. If we do not take action and reopen schools soon, the impact of lost learning could be irreparable. The gaps between the 'haves' and the 'have nots' in our communities are widening daily and we will face years of frantic endeavour, in inevitable austerity, to compensate for this dislocation of learning. As educators, this is our area of expertise; but we are also entirely conscious of the economic imperative that our schools reopen, so that people can get back to work.

The Government has announced that the next phase of school reopening will commence from June 1st provided that key tests are met. This will have been a difficult decision to take and it marks a first tentative staging point on the road to recovery. Reopening is essential for the sake of our children's education and our nation's future. The wellbeing of our staff and pupils is paramount and we are committed to implementing protective measures, advised by public health experts, to keep them safe at all times and alleviate the worries we know that some have. Rigorous risk assessment at school level is a precursor to any school reopening.

The quality of some of the debate over school reopening has often been unhelpful and is not a genuine reflection of our sector. We are living through a national crisis and ask for improved dialogue from this point. Finding optimum solutions requires all parties to work together in the interests of our young people and our collective future. We need to abide by scientific advice, collaborate positively and welcome our children back to school.

Signed:

- Benedick Ashmore-Short, Chief Executive, Astrea Academy Trust
- Dean Ashton, Chief Executive, Reach South Academy Trust
- Adrian Ball, Chief Executive, Diocese of Ely Multi Academy Trust
- Simon Beamish, Chief Executive, Leigh Academies Trust
- Stephen Chamberlain, Chief Executive, Active Learning Trust
- Dr Jonty Clark OBE, The Beckmead Trust
- Jo Coton, Chief Executive, NET Academies Trust

- Tim Coulson, Chief Executive, Unity Schools Partnership
- Dame Rachel De Souza DBE, Chief Executive, Inspiration Trust
- Julian Drinkall, Chief Executive, Academies Enterprise Trust
- Rob Gasson, Chief Executive, Wave Trust
- Hugh Greenway, Chief Executive, The Elliot Foundation Academies Trust
- Rowena Hackwood, Chief Executive, David Ross Education Trust
- Nick Hudson, Chief Executive, Ormiston Academies Trust
- Rob McDonough, Chief Executive, East Midlands Education Trust
- Jane Millward, Chief Executive, E-ACT
- Sir Dan Moynihan, Chief Executive, Harris Federation
- Martyn Oliver, Chief Executive, Outwood Grange Academies Trust
- Hamid Patel CBE, Chief Executive, Star Academies
- Paul Smith, Chief Executive, Future Academies
- Paul Tarn, Chief Executive, Delta Academies Trust
- Steve Taylor, Chief Executive, Cabot Learning Federation
- Sir Nick Weller, Chief Executive, Dixons Academies Trust