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B73 6AZ

Date 04 January 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

### **ATT academies - #safesteadygradual – January 2021**

We write wishing you all a Happy New Year for 2021, and to welcome our many families back from their Christmas breaks. We trust those breaks were as enjoyable as they could be in these challenging times.

You will be very aware that the January re-opening of schools and academies has attracted much national media attention given the complexities we are all currently managing. This letter explains the ongoing management of our response to the pandemic as it continues to evolve. It does NOT replace the more detailed communication you, quite rightly, expect from our academy Principals and senior leaders. The latter will continue of course.

As we are sure you are aware, the physical and emotional health and safety of our children and our colleagues has been our number one priority throughout the pandemic; this remains the case. We are very proud of our response to date which has been praised, in various forums, by the Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted and the Health and Safety Executive. We are as ambitious in our response to the pandemic as we are about the quality of education we provide for our pupils. This ambition will not change.

### **Risk Assessments and operating plans in academies**

We have reviewed our local academy risk assessments and operating procedures over the Christmas break period in response to each (and there have been many) government announcement and accompanying guidance. We remain confident that our procedures are compliant with government expectations and mitigate Covid-19 associated risks appropriately. As you would expect, we are determined that our academies will be physically, safely open for all of our pupils as much as is practically possible for the remainder of this difficult period.

### **Academy openings and closures**

You will already be aware from academy Principals' most recent communications, that our academies have re-opened on 4 January 2021 in varied ways – with different arrangements for our primary, special and secondary pupils (as nationally instructed by the Department for Education). As has been the case throughout this difficult period, we are following DfE guidance – thus, our position on the reopening in January is aligned to national expectations which are:

- **Primary Academies** can operate as planned from 4th January (where they are not situated within an area covered by the Government's 'contingency framework')

## **# TransformingLives**

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- **Special Academies** can operate as planned from 4th January with some flexibility in the guidance to make arrangements with parents around individual cases (as we did during the first national lockdown and we have risk assessments in place)
- **Secondary Academies** will operate according to government expectations as follows: Key Worker and Vulnerable pupils attend from 4th January; exam groups attend in addition from 11th January; and all pupils attend from 18th January.

While we aim to adhere rigidly to the above arrangements, there will be occasions (very unfortunate but very necessary) where we will have to revert to home learning – either for part of an academy pupil population (a bubble or bubbles) - or for the entire academy pupil population. As has been the case since September 2020, we do not take such decisions lightly – ever; but we do need to do so when we are unable to open our academies safely. This is usually linked to enforced staff absences – for example, due to either infection, suspected infection, or self-isolation. As has also been the case since September 2020, we will always endeavour to let families know of such changes as quickly as possible via direct, speedy communication from academy Principals.

### **The national picture**

Again, as we are sure you will appreciate, the national picture continues to change rapidly – sometimes by the hour. We continue to ask for your patience as we endeavour to translate such change into practical local arrangements in each of our academies. The government has made clear that such flexibility remains both necessary and expected – at least for the duration of this Spring term.

### **Attendance and expectations**

It remains our duty, as parents and educators, to ensure that our children attend each day when our academies are open and physical attendance is expected. Government guidance (issued in September 2020 and still live) is quite clear in this regard:

‘Missing out on more time in the classroom risks pupils falling further behind. Those with higher overall absence tend to achieve less well in both primary and secondary school. School attendance will therefore be mandatory again from the beginning of the autumn term. This means from that point, the usual rules on school attendance will apply, including:

- parents’ duty to secure that their child attends regularly at school where the child is a registered pupil at school and they are of compulsory school age;
- schools’ responsibilities to record attendance and follow up absence
- the availability to issue sanctions, including fixed penalty notices in line with local authorities’ codes of conduct.’

Similarly, all our expectations around pupil behaviour, discipline and hard work remain very much live in every single academy – whether working within an academy building or remotely at home.

### **Safety and care**

We understand that some of you and your children will be anxious about returning in January. Please be reassured that we continue to take exceptional measures to make our academies as safe as they



can be. We will continue to provide additional emotional and wellbeing support for any pupils that need it, along with additional opportunities to support learning where this is required. We are all determined that our pupils will absolutely not be 'a lost generation' and we continue to adapt our curriculum to make sure that they get the learning and knowledge that they need to achieve success in the future.

Your children deserve a great, and safe, education – we will not let them down.

Our warmest wishes to you all. Take care and stay safe.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernard Dickenson".

Bernard Dickenson, Chair of Trustees

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Debbie Clinton".

Debbie Clinton, Chief Executive Officer