

Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2020

Dear Families,

I wanted to write to you all to lay out our thinking about reopening our schools. This is a long letter but an important one. Having read it, if you have any questions or comments please do not hesitate to contact me on [Jill.McLaughlin@Islingtonfutures.org](mailto:Jill.McLaughlin@Islingtonfutures.org).

**THANK YOU:** Let me start by thanking you all for the support and good humour you have shown over the last 10 weeks since our schools and our lives were so disrupted. I know how hard it has been for many of you and staff are so impressed by the way you have supported the learning of your children.

For some of you it has been a time of personal loss of loved ones, a time of missing family members and friends and a time of real concern over work, money and food. Our thoughts and sympathies are with you. This will have impacted on your children and as we move ahead in the coming weeks, please do let your child's teacher know of any particular incidents or issues that might cause particular concern for your child.

Our secondary schools have been welcoming students every day, throughout this period and over the last few weeks, they have been getting ready to welcome Year 10 students back. After many plans and checks, we are confident that working with you, both Beacon High and EGA are ready to welcome students this week, and I ask you to support us in this.

**STAYING SAFE:** Having locked ourselves away so that we stop the spread of the virus, we now need to start learning to live safely so that whilst the virus still exists, we all limit the extent to which it is passed on. We all know how to do this and I know that you have received a lot of information from the school as to what we need to do in this next stage. It is really important that we all do this, that you help your youngsters understand what is expected of them. In essence we need to keep clean, we need to keep our distance especially indoors and we need to take action if we are not feeling well. There is plenty of information to help understand the details.

**REOPENING OUR SCHOOLS GRADUALLY AND SAFELY, FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO RETURN:** In Islington, the number of new cases reported now is one of the lowest in London, we want to keep it that way, and we will do so by being careful. It does mean that we have the opportunity for our schools to start to re-open so that our students can return to the schools that they love, and enable you as families to start to return to a more normal way of life, but it will take time and practice.

We are starting with just a quarter of year 10 in school on any one day. As we are keeping the remote learning going, our teachers need time to do that as well as work in the schools, so we will be having shorter days and keeping one day where planning and remote learning will continue.

In late May I visited the schools and went through all the proposed arrangements for the students. We looked at the entrances and facilities to clean hands on arrival and throughout the day, where they will study and how they will get lunch. We have also looked at the plan for work during this period and the opportunities for safe socialising.

Ms Dibb, Executive Headteacher monitored both schools to make sure that all the plans had been implemented to make the schools as safe as possible. On Wednesday 10th June, the Governors Chairs Committee formally signed off the decision to open our schools to year 10 students.

**HOW YOU CAN HELP:** We cannot eliminate the risk entirely. We also need our students and staff to behave in a way that limits passing on the virus. This means reminding them that they need to try and keep a distance from each other. This is difficult for all of us let alone teenagers. We see someone we have missed or someone we really like and we want to give them a hug, we want to comfort them, we stand close by to hear them more easily. We all have to help each other to keep gaps between us. Don't feel embarrassed to take a step back. Please help your son or daughter by discussing this with them at home and explaining why.

We need to keep washing our hands, keeping our clothes and homes clean, so that we remove any virus that we might have picked up. Please encourage your son or daughter to wash hands, face and change clothes before they get that much wanted drink or snack, and particularly before they get close to older and more vulnerable family or household members.

It is very important and we do need you to help if you or a member of your household, or someone you have recently spent lots of time with is not feeling well. Do not brush it off. Stay home, get you and your family tested and let us know. Getting tested does not cost anything, and it may be that we have many tests over a period of weeks, but that is the best way of knowing where the virus is, and being able to avoid it.

So the school is prepared, we know how we need to behave and we know that if we keep washing our hands and not touching our faces, that we will significantly reduce our chances of becoming ill even if we meet someone who does have the virus.

**WHY WE DECIDED TO BEGIN OPENING NOW:** Even with the best remote teaching that any of us can provide, our young people are missing out on the experience and learning of school. They are missing friends, socialising, boundaries and routines and opportunities to discuss and talk about the situations happening around them with people of their own age and different backgrounds. Some are not getting out of their home at all, they are missing valuable exercise and sunlight, both essential for their health.

These, alongside learning in class are all very important. Whilst we would like to bring back all our students full time, we are only able to comply with the safety guidelines by bringing back 25% of year 10 at any one time. Year 10 are being prioritised so that they have the help now to prepare them for learning for their GCSE's next summer. The period in school will help them make much more of the home learning.

Working together I am confident that both Beacon High and EGA are ready to welcome year 10 students back from Monday 15th June. You will have received information about confirming their attendance and when they should arrive.

We know that some of you are not ready to send your son or daughter to school yet, or that they are not feeling ready to attend. We understand that and we hope that as others attend this will give more confidence. Please do contact the school or me, if you need some help in this. In the meantime, it is most important that you keep supporting home learning.

If we all take this seriously, work together and develop great new habits, our young people will be able to enjoy being back at school, and we will be able to pick up our work or activities that we have been missing, and hopefully, by September, we will all be able to start the new term confidently and safely.

Yours faithfully

Jill McLaughlin, Chair of Governors

Islington Futures Federation