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Children's Services
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Dear Parent(s)/Carer(s)

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your understanding and co-operation during what has been an extremely difficult time for our schools and your children.

I hope you join me in thanking teachers and head teachers, for their efforts in keeping schools open since lockdown for the children of key workers and vulnerable children. In many cases, this has included provision throughout the holidays. Most recently, head teachers have undertaken a significant amount of work in re-configuring their schools to make them safe to open more widely to more pupils in nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6. I am very grateful for their efforts to make this happen.

Each school in Leeds is different and each school has unique circumstances. This is why we have been very clear that all schools will be operating slightly differently from each other during the current period. The numbers of pupils schools have been able to welcome back varies from school to school and school leaders have had to consider a wide number of variables.

Some schools, for example, have smaller classrooms, whereas some have greater numbers of 'shielding' staff. Both of these considerations result in the school being able to accommodate fewer pupils. In a number of schools, the numbers of vulnerable children or children of key workers have risen considerably which has resulted in a lack of capacity to welcome more children back.

Many schools have now reached the position where they cannot take any more children back safely and within guidelines. As a result, some head teachers are in the difficult position of not being able to offer a child a place. I know there has been some talk of using community facilities such as church halls, leisure centres, social clubs and scout huts to provide additional space but current government guidance is clear that schools should not use these facilities at the moment.

Accommodating children in non-educational settings is not as easy to do as it may first appear. It would highlight significant safeguarding, Health and Safety, resourcing and staffing implications and the priority for school leaders is the safety and well-being of your children. Schools must await further guidance from the government before considering this as an option.

Many of you are aware that the Government announced plans earlier this week to relax the 2m social distancing rule and may wonder if this means that schools can take more children. The government have said that from 4th July where it is not possible to stay two metres apart, guidance will allow people to keep a social distance of 'one metre plus'. In Leeds, our current guidance to schools regarding social distancing of 2 metres **has not changed**; a 1 metre plus policy would require additional measures such as face coverings to be used routinely and would expose staff and children to greater risk of infection.

I know that the current situation is frustrating to parents and carers who are keen for their child to return to school. Despite their best efforts, school leaders will inevitably not be able to accommodate all requests from parents. I am writing to ask you to be respectful of the decision made by the head teacher of your child's school, in the knowledge that it has been made with the safety of all children and staff at its heart.

Head teachers are now busy planning for September when it is hoped that all pupils will be able to return to school full time. School leaders are eagerly awaiting government guidance as to the expectations for September and I know they will communicate their plans with you as soon as they are in a position to do so.

I anticipate that restrictions, for example staggered start and finish times, class bubbles and increased cleaning and hygiene routines, will remain in place from September to ensure the safety of staff and pupils

I thank you for your continuing patience during these difficult times. I hope you and your families stay safe and well.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sal Tariq', with a horizontal line underneath.

Sal Tariq OBE
Director, Children and Families