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4<sup>th</sup> January 2021

Dear Parents/Carers,

I would like to wish you all a Happy and Healthy 2021. I hope you all have had a relaxed Christmas break despite the situation we find ourselves in at the moment.

I am sure you are all feeling anxious with the current infection rates and press coverage regarding re-opening of the educational settings. The rapidly rising infection rates mean it should come as no surprise that tougher measures are being considered and implemented. Infection levels are nearly four times higher now that they were at the start of last month as the new, more transmissible variant of the virus emerged over the autumn.

SMT met on Sunday afternoon to discuss the risk assessment and opening arrangements on how best to keep children and staff safe now that Reading is in Tier 4 - 'Stay at home'.

Our planned INSET- face to face first aid course has been postponed until further notice and this time will be used to put the new arrangements into place. Our priority is to ensure that both the children and the staff remain safe and we reduce the risk as much as possible.

**From Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> January 2021 until at least Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2021, the arrangements are as follow;**

#### WATERSIDE DAYCARE

- Open between 8.00am till **4.00 pm**, an early finish will ensure that the continuity of staff can be maintained without having to use additional casual staff or staff moving between bubbles. It will also enable the cleaners to have sufficient time to carry out enhanced cleaning.
- The children/staff will be based in Waterside building as well as Meadowside building to give them more space and create more 'bubbles'

- The children will be split into ‘bubbles’ of no more than 15 children. The early years ratio will remain unchanged.
- The children/ staff will REMAIN in the same bubble at ALL times and will not be mixing with other children/ staff.
- You will all be informed which ‘bubble’ your child is in and the arrangements for dropping off and picking up, the ‘bubble’ staff etc.

#### NURSERY SCHOOL (Hillside/Meadowside)

- Open between 8.30am – 3.30pm to **vulnerable children and the children of the key workers only**.
- The children/staff will be based in Hillside building only.
- The children will be split into ‘bubbles’ of no more than 15 children. The early years ratio will remain unchanged.
- The children/ staff will REMAIN in the same bubble at ALL times and will not be mixing with other children/ staff.
- You will all be informed if your child has been offered a place and which ‘bubble’ they are in, the arrangements for dropping off and picking up, the ‘bubble’ staff etc.

As a parent myself, I want to be completely honest with you. I strongly urge you to carefully consider whether you wish to send your child back to our Centre. **The Centre will NOT be the same.** The children might find staying in their ‘bubble’ at all times distressing. Having limited toys to play with, different routines, rooms, buildings, gardens, staff etc. may well be upsetting. The children in their ‘bubbles’ will spend their day in the Centre in a kind of virtual cocoon, with no cross-over between bubbles. These micro-groups of children, the ‘bubbles’, are crucial to minimising the risk as social distancing is not realistic in early years. Some of our children have experienced ‘bubbles’ in Summer term after we re-opened the Centre after the first lockdown. Please have a look at social stories to prepare your child for ‘bubbles’, <https://www.norcotearlyyearscentre.co.uk/covid-19/support-stories/>.

We will continue with **home learning** and posting videos on our website. Ellie, our Foundation Lead teacher will lead on home learning and will be supported by the staff working from home due to shielding or other reasons. Please continue to upload your posts on Tapestry so that the staff can write the next steps to help you move your child on with their learning. Those families whose children are not attending the Centre, will continue to receive weekly calls. **These might not be done by your key workers.**

I can fully appreciate the enormous decision you are making in deciding whether to send your child back to Norcot. If you are struggling, need any support or would like to discuss the measures that have been put in place once we re-open, please do not hesitate to contact myself, Lisa or Helen. We are always here to help

and guide you through these challenging times. We will be emailing you our updated Risk Assessment before we reopen.

We have worked tirelessly to ensure that all children and staff returning to the Centre remain as safe as possible. I appreciate your understanding and patience through this extremely difficult time. I would like to thank all the staff for their courage in continuing to provide the care and education for our children in the Centre, which reflects their commitment, dedication and professionalism. As you can appreciate, they are concerned for their own safety as well as their own families.

Please be assured that the governors and SMT have not taken this decision lightly but we must ensure that everyone who is part of our Centre remains as safe as possible. Thank you all for your unending support. We will get through this together.

Yours sincerely



Katarina Bingham

Head of Centre