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Northumberland school plans full return before summer

Children, parents and staff at a Northumberland school have greeted with excitement the news of plans to reopen fully, and welcome back all pupils for a month before the summer break.

Cramlington Village Primary School (CVPS) principal Debbie Wylie is consulting with staff, governors and parents with a view to re-opening the school fully at the beginning of July, welcoming back Years 2 - 5 children to join their peers and enjoy four weeks of fun and learning before the school holidays in August.

Since the introduction of lockdown measures in March, the school has remained open to support children who met government criteria as well as around 30 children of key workers. Last month, a shift in government guidance enabled CVPS to bring back its Nursery, Reception, Y1 and Y6 children. Now, Debbie says her staff cannot wait for their "school family" reunion to be completed.

"Our children, parents and staff have been incredibly positive and receptive to returning back to school and the changes the staff have made to ensure they are returning to a safe and vibrant environment," says Debbie.

"As soon as the government announced that schools could open to some year groups, I was eager to ensure that all practical and safety measures were put in place to enable the school to open," says Debbie. "We have been able to show and assure parents that we are adhering strictly to government guidelines and ensuring the safety of our staff and children at all times".

The school's start and finish times for each year group are being staggered to minimise the number of children coming to and from school at any one time. The appropriate two-metre floor markings have been laid out and hand-sanitising stations have been placed throughout the school building as well as outside. Throughout the day the children are split into small, manageable groups (bubbles) with school dinners being delivered to each of these groups to ensure the bubble is sustained at all times. The children have their own desks, trays and stationery which is kept in individual trays when not being used.

It's so encouraging to see our children embrace the new changes, adhering to the rules and also hearing how excited they are to see each other again, whilst enjoying enriched learning experiences together at school.

The school responded immediately to school closures, providing students with an online learning platform that aimed to reflect a normal school day, with videos from each class teacher explaining the lessons. In preparation for the closure, the school bought extra

Chromebooks that were set up and loaned to families who needed them, with guidance on online safety.

The online learning at CVPS has followed the usual school timetable, with guided reading, Read Write Inc, literacy lesson and then numeracy in the morning. The emphasis of afternoons sessions has been fun, but still relating to the class topic. Weekly forest school activities and PE lessons have also been posted online for the children to enjoy with their families outdoors. Work posted by the children on their online platform has been viewed and marked daily by teaching staff.

A subscription to a digital book service ensured that children had continued access to books, at a time when books could not be borrowed from school and community libraries were closed.

In order to safeguard children and support families, teachers have also been contacting parents and carers via email, phone and video messages to help them with any issues they may be having with online learning.

CVPS staff have also been discovering new ways of working, not least those who are shielding and needing support to work from home. Virtual meetings via Google Hangouts have become a daily norm, with documents shared through Google Drive and Docs.

The school's chef and kitchen team have supported families entitled to free school meals with takeaway lunches and the admin team have sent out free school meal vouchers to families unable to collect meals. The school's dedicated in-house facilities team has implemented rigorous cleaning regimes across school.

And the much-loved CVPS family of animals has not been neglected either. Some of the "bubbles" look after the school pigs and chickens during the school day with the support of the adult in their bubble and rigorous hygiene measures when sharing equipment. Some school families have also enjoyed time at the weekends, coming into the school grounds safely to care for and interact with the animals – a fun, outdoor activity for families at a time when other parks and spaces have been closed.

Notes to editors

For further information, please visit <http://villageprimary.org>. For interview requests, please ring Debbie Wylie on 01670 735177 or email deborah.wylie@villageprimary.org