

Returning to school in September

Dear parents and carers,

Firstly, I would like to personally thank you for your patience, understanding and cooperation during what has certainly been an incredibly difficult and unprecedented time.

I know that this has been a challenging period for everyone, with families being impacted by the coronavirus situation in many ways.

The majority of our schools remained open throughout the pandemic, for vulnerable children and those of key workers. Many welcomed back Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils in June.

However many of you have needed to support your child's education at home over the last few months. I know that this hasn't been easy, so thank you for your commitment to doing this.

I now want to make sure that you know that we have been working hard for a while now to get our schools ready to reopen in September. The government is very clear that all children, in all year groups, are expected to return to school in September, and it is our firm intention to achieve this, as long as it is safe to do so.

Unfortunately many pupils will not have attended school for several months and I know that some families may have concerns about their children going back. I want to reassure you about the safety measures that will be put in place for when your child goes back to school in September.

The safety and wellbeing of both our pupils and our staff is our highest priority. Every school will be undertaking comprehensive health and safety risk assessments as part of their planning for all pupils to return, to make sure that everyone is safe in school.

Schools will look and feel different when the new term starts because of some of the measures we have had to put in place to manage the risks that remain from coronavirus.

Schools, colleges and settings are being encouraged to communicate with families to outline the changes that they are introducing to keep staff, children and young people safe. We would encourage you to carefully read any communication you receive about new arrangements and to contact them directly if you have any questions.

Children and young people across all ages and stages will be required to remain within specified separate groups at all times. Staff are required to generally maintain a distance of 2 metres from pupils and spend a maximum of 15 minutes at a distance of 1 metre from them. Safe distancing expectations will apply whilst within the education establishment and when travelling to and from schools or settings.

The government's guidance recognises that younger children may not be able to maintain social distancing so it is likely that for younger children the emphasis will be on separating groups, and for older children, it will be on distancing. Your school will set out how this will work.

Your child's school may also introduce new processes for drop off and collection. If they do this, it will be to help keep groups apart as they arrive and leave school and will not reduce the amount of time that is spent teaching.

New hygiene arrangements will be introduced and schools will ensure that all children wash their hands immediately when they arrive and frequently during the school day. You can support this by:

- Ensuring that anyone who has coronavirus symptoms, or has someone in their household who does, does not attend school. This means if your child, or someone in your household, has symptoms you should not send them to school
- Engaging with the NHS Test and Trace process so that cases can be identified and action taken. This means if your child develops symptoms, you should arrange for them to get a test and you should inform your school of the results of that test.

We are incredibly grateful for the commitment and dedication that staff in schools and settings have shown over the last few months and we know that they are really looking forward to welcoming back all children and young people in September.

Schools and settings have worked really hard to put new arrangements in place so children and young people can return safely and we would ask you to support them by observing any new measures that they introduce.

Regular attendance at school or other places of learning is vital for not only for the education of children and young people but also for their wellbeing and wider development. We know that across the age ranges pupils have missed being with their friends and teachers and will be looking forward to their returning to schools and settings in September.

For more information you can look at your school's / setting's website or for updates on support available, visit the schools information on our website.

Yours sincerely

County Councillor Phillippa Williamson

Cabinet member for children, young people and schools