
11th June 2020

Dear Parent or Carer,

On behalf of our schools and the local authority, I would like to thank you for your continued help during the Covid-19 crisis and the lockdown. I do not underestimate the sacrifices many have made and continue to do so to help reduce the risk of infection. Throughout this crisis, our schools, their governors, staff and leaders have worked to maintain care for our most vulnerable and the children of critical workers. This has included care provision over the school holidays at Easter and in May.

I know that the phased return for children in Reception, Years 1 and 6 has been widely welcomed. Our schools have rightly undertaken rigorous and detailed risk assessments in line with the expectations of the local authority and government, to assess how they can phase a return safely, and in line with the government's guidance on social distancing. I am aware that some parents are not happy that, although their child is in one of the core year groups mentioned, they are still not able to return due to the school's capacity, staffing, and their assessment of risk. I recognise the frustration among some parents. However, schools and school leaders have come to their decisions sensibly, and through risk assessments that have been questioned and challenged by the local authority and will continue to be so as the situation changes. We fully support the decisions made by our schools which are based on full consideration of the local situation. I recognise that some question why this is different school by school. It has to be, as every school is different in terms of size, staffing and accommodation.

I recognise that the Prime Minister recently retracted from an earlier ambition that all primary school children would return for face to face schooling before the summer break. This change will, I am sure, have dashed the hopes of many parents that their children would be returning to school again before September. The change of heart is a recognition that our schools are working to their current capacity in both staffing and learning spaces, and also that they are ensuring the safety of those who are able to attend school. We continue to support schools in sticking to their current plans as we know that these have been developed with a detailed understanding of the context in their own school. I recognise that some of our school governors and leaders are receiving some considerable pressure to change their plans and risk assessments to accommodate additional pupils. To make such changes now, when the national guidance has not changed, would be wrong.

Whilst some parents are rightly questioning when their children will return, how they will catch up on lost learning and return to the routine of attending school, these are all questions that collectively schools, local authorities, and the government, are working to address. We will hope to be able to share a roadmap for this in the coming weeks.

I do ask for your patience and support for our schools who have worked professionally throughout and continue to have the interests of all our children at the centre of their decision making.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wagstaff

Director of Education & Skills