

All Parents and Carers

My Ref: CW/D

Date: 13 July 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

### **Full reopening of Schools in September 2020**

Firstly, I would like to thank you for supporting your children whilst schools have been only open to some specific groups of pupils. I appreciate that you will have had to make many adjustments to your daily routines to accommodate child care and to support them with their learning at home.

As you will know, the Government has announced that all schools, including special schools, will reopen in September. Our local schools have been working through the latest guidance from the Department for Education to plan how they can do this. The Government have made it clear that they feel it is now safe enough to reopen all pupils in September. This means that education is once again compulsory and that parents and carers will be expected to send their children to school.

Your child's school will write out to you shortly to explain how they will manage the reopening in September. This will differ from school to school as no two schools are the same but they will tell you if they need to make any changes to normal routines in line with the Government's guidance. This could include changing start and finish times, using different entrances, changing the number of weekly sessions a school is open for, how they will operate bubbles of children and any other special adjustments which are designed to keep children and staff safe. Please can you support your school by respecting the changes they temporarily have to make to accommodate more children on site.

If your child has Special Educational Needs or Disabilities and is currently receiving travel assistance, then the council will reinstate your usual transport arrangements. However, if you would prefer not to use the transport then it may be possible to access a personal budget which you can use to make your own transport arrangements. Please contact [SEN\\_transportOfficer@sandwell.gov.uk](mailto:SEN_transportOfficer@sandwell.gov.uk) and leave your name and phone number together with the name of the young person being transported, we will contact you to discuss the offer. If you would like to explore this option please contact us as soon as possible so that arrangements can be made for the start of the Autumn term.

If your child has no option but to use public transport to get to school then national guidance should be followed which means that they should wear a face covering/mask as they travel. However, if your child has Special Educational

Needs, they may be exempt from wearing a face covering on public transport. Guidance and exemption card template can be found [here](#).

I know that our school staff are really looking forward to having all of the pupils back in class and I am sure that children will be keen to see their friends and teachers again. Initially, staff will make sure pupils are happy and settled in school and are ready for learning. Once this has been achieved then they will focus on the curriculum and work needed to support your child's next steps in learning. We are hopeful that all schools will be operating smoothly very quickly in September.

There are a set of frequently asked questions attached to this letter; however, if you have any further concerns about what will be happening in September then I know your schools will be able to talk with you and reassure you about the plans they have in place.

On behalf of your schools I would like to thank you for your support during the lockdown period.

Yours sincerely



Chris Ward  
**Director of Education, Skills and Employment**

## **Frequently Asked Questions – Returning to School**

### **Is it safe for my child to return to school?**

No environment is completely risk free, but schools are looking forward to welcoming back all their pupils and are doing all they can to ensure that children and staff are as safe as possible. Now that community transmission is at a much lower level, for the vast majority of children the benefits of returning to school far outweigh the risks. All children are expected to return to school in September. The likelihood of children becoming seriously ill with coronavirus (COVID-19) is extremely low, and there is no evidence that children spread the disease more easily than adults.

### **What are schools doing to keep children and staff safe?**

Every school will have carried out a risk assessment and will have plans to implement the following measures:

- Ensuring that those who have Coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or who have someone in their household who does, do not attend school.
- Planning for regular hand washing throughout the day and promoting 'catch it, bin it, kill it' for coughs and sneezes.
- Extra cleaning, particularly for frequently touched surfaces.
- Reducing contact between individuals and groups and maintaining social distancing wherever possible.
- Engaging with the NHS 'Test and Trace' system to ensure that anyone in contact with a confirmed case can be followed up and isolated and tested if required.

The risk assessments will also consider the steps needed to protect children and staff who are more vulnerable to contracting the virus because of medical or complex needs, age or ethnicity.

Parents have a key role in this process as detailed below.

### **Will children have to social distance?**

There will be no more limits on class sizes, but schools will have to plan to keep groups of pupils apart as much as possible, by keeping them separate in their class or key stage 'bubble' or year group for older pupils.

There will not be a requirement for one metre or two metre distancing between children, but schools should encourage this, particularly older pupils where they can. Where space permits, desks might be rearranged to reduce face-to-face contact.

Teachers have been strongly advised to keep a two-metre distance from other adults and older pupils.

It is recognised that younger children and those with complex special needs will not be able to socially distance and will require support from staff. Schools will use other measures to minimise risk of transmission such as frequent handwashing and enhanced cleaning.

Schools might need to adjust or stagger arrival, breaks and collection times in order to avoid crowding. Your school will inform you if this is the case.

### **Who will have to wear a mask?**

Children and staff will not be required to wear face coverings when in school, but those over the age of 11 will be required to do so if travelling in on public transport. Any face covering will need to be removed on arrival to school and hands washed. The Government guidance for travelling on Public Transport does not apply to children travelling on specialist/dedicated school transport (eg. SEND travel or school buses/coaches) but further guidance will be published shortly.

Staff only have to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) if they are dealing with a child with Coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms and cannot socially distance, or if they are providing physical care to a child with complex needs where PPE is routinely required.

### **What if my child has a medical condition which makes them vulnerable? If**

community transmission rates of Coronavirus continue to decline, then shielding advice for all adults and children will pause on 1 August. This means that even the small number of pupils who will remain on the shielded patient list can also return to school, as can those who have family members who are shielding. Read the [current advice on shielding](#)

If rates of the disease rise in local areas, children (or family members) from that area will be advised to shield during the period where rates remain high and therefore, they may be temporarily absent.

Pupils who remain under the care of a specialist health professional may need to discuss their care with their health professional before returning to school (usually at their next planned clinical appointment). You can find more at [COVID-19 - 'shielding' guidance for children and young people](#).

### **What will happen if my child becomes ill with Coronavirus (COVID-19)?**

If your child develops any of the following symptoms

- a new persistent cough
- high temperature
- loss or change to sense of taste or smell

they should stay at home, the school should be notified, and a test arranged immediately <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-an-antigen-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/>

Tests can also be ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet.

The child must self-isolate for 7 days from the onset of symptoms.

If the test is positive the NHS Test and Trace Service will request details of anyone your child has had close contact with. Please notify your school of the result.

The whole household should also isolate for 14 days, unless there is a negative test result. See guidance via this link.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Children will also need to stay at home for 14 days if another member of your household develops coronavirus (COVID 19) symptoms.

### **What if a child falls ill at school?**

If your child develops symptoms at school, then they will be isolated from other pupils until they can be collected and taken home. You should arrange a test immediately <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-and-tracing/get-an-antigen-test-to-check-if-you-have-coronavirus/> and isolate as above. Schools will have access to a small number of home testing kits for families that are unable to get to a testing centre.

### **What if several children fall ill?**

If another child or staff member at your school is a confirmed case of coronavirus (ie. has a positive test), then your child might be asked to isolate at home for up to 14 days if they are considered to be a close contact.

If two or more cases are found within 14 days, larger groups of young people might have to self-isolate as a precautionary measure.

In cases where a more widespread outbreak is apparent, the local community testing team could be deployed for large-scale testing.

In all cases, the local Health Protection Team will be providing advice on outbreak management to the school.

Closing schools, will not generally be necessary unless there is a spike in infection rates in a particular area and a local lockdown is announced.

### **Will I be fined for not sending my child to school?**

The Government have made it clear that attendance at school will be compulsory from September for all children. This means that unless your child has COVID-19 symptoms or has been told to isolate, parents and carers can be fined for not sending you child to school. However, initially schools will be working hard, alongside the local authority, to support young people to reintegrate back into school life successfully.