

To Parent and Carers

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SKILLS**

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Our Ref. LR/cd

Date: 18 June 2020

Dear Parent and Carers

It has been a little while now since we communicated with you around the position of schools in Solihull. This has been such a difficult time for everyone, not least for families, schools and their wider communities. It has been heart-warming to hear the positive stories over these last few weeks of pupils starting to return to their schools. Leadership teams in schools have worked so hard to make schools safe for your children to return. Head teachers have a direct contact for our local Public Health team as well as with Public Health England so they can immediately take advice about any concerns or queries they may have.

If your child has already returned, you will be aware of all of the protective measures schools are implementing, the increased health and safety and hygiene measures, and the reduced class sizes to enable pupils to socially distance. Schools are operating a bubble system (sometimes called a hub) so that the risk of spreading the virus is minimised. Pupils are also, wherever possible, remaining in the same bubble to minimise contact. We ask you as families to support schools with this and maintain those social bubbles outside of school as current guidance states that children shouldn't be going into the homes of others. We know that this is really helping minimise outbreaks, but we also know this can be frustrating especially for teenagers, however it is really important. So far we have had very few suspected cases in our schools, and we believe one of the reasons for this is how well prepared schools are to deal with any issues should they arise.

We have been awaiting government guidance on the wider re-opening of schools, which arrived this week. The government has said that if schools have the space, the staffing capacity and all protective measures implemented, they may be able to open further year groups in schools - this will, however, be down to each individual school's risk assessment and capacity. Secondary schools may offer other year groups a meeting in school before the end of term. Therefore some of you may find that your child is invited back, yet others will not. I know this will be disappointing news for some of you, but with the current guidance it is unfortunately inevitable this will be the case whilst current social distancing requirements remain in place.

The government has been clear that pupils need to be prioritised for a place in order of

- Key worker children
- Vulnerable pupils
- Nursery
- Reception
- Year 1
- Year 6
- Year 10
- Year 12

Only after taking pupils from these groups, if schools feel they still have capacity, will more pupils be invited back.

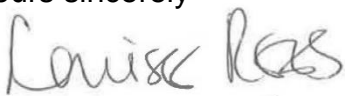
For those of you who are parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities, we know that this is a particularly worrying time and that both you and they may be feeling very anxious about returning to school after such a long time away. The requirement on special schools is different and although there are no particular year groups being prioritised, our special schools will be working closely with all families to welcome as many pupils back as possible. The numbers of pupils in these schools continues to grow. Some of you have sent us some great examples of how children can be supported to understand what is happening, which we have shared with schools. They are also sharing good practice with each other. We will be in contact with you to see what else we can do to help.

We are currently working really hard with school leaders to plan for September. We are awaiting government guidance on this. However in Solihull we want to have already done our own thinking and planning so that schools can be as prepared as possible - giving you as parents as much information as possible before the new school year starts.

This has been one of the most difficult things we have ever had to deal with, whether at national level, local level or school level. We are hugely proud of our schools here in Solihull and what they are doing for our children and young people. We also want to thank you as parents and carers for supporting this and the hard work you are also doing at home with your children. We have seen some really inspirational and moving examples of things that children and young people across Solihull have been doing during lockdown – fund-raising, befriending elderly residents through sending letters, writing and performing music and songs to name just a few. It has been, and will continue to be a challenging time for all of us – but it has brought some positives as well as difficulties. We're sure that many of you, like us at the council and in schools, were also really pleased to hear that the government has now agreed to provide funding for vouchers for children on free school meals during the summer break (£15 per week, per child).

If you have any queries, please do contact your school in the usual way in the first instance.

Yours sincerely



Louise Rees  
**Director of Children's Services and Skills**