

Dear Parent / Carer,

Coronavirus (Covid-19) Update – Phased Reopening of Schools

Firstly, I want to thank you once again for your contribution to the national response to the Coronavirus pandemic. For the majority of you, being at home with your child(ren) and supporting their continued learning, alongside your own work and wellbeing, is a significant challenge in what are both unprecedented and worrying times. However, we do know that this action has helped to reduce the spread of the virus and is helping to save lives.

I am sure that many of you will have watched the Prime Minister's address to the nation on Sunday evening and read subsequent details either online or in the media about the plans to begin to re-open schools more widely.

You will have heard the Prime Minister indicating that the government believes that as well as schools being open to the children of critical workers and for vulnerable pupils, it may be in a position to implement a phased re-opening of schools from 1st June at the earliest, starting with pupils in nurseries, reception, year one and year six. This will be in addition to accommodating children of critical workers and vulnerable pupils.

Secondary Schools and Alternative Providers are considering their approach to offering some face to face time for pupils and we are working with Special Schools on their plans to gradually increase the number of children and young people on site, again from the 1st June at the earliest.

This is part of the government's conditional plan which it says will remain under regular review, which is yet to be finalised and will only happen if the level of new infections continues to decrease and the government's other conditions are met.

We are working with schools to support their plans for a gradual and phased re-opening. Their plans will be guided by a thorough Health and Safety Risk Assessment taking in to account their physical capacity on the school site and staffing levels.

We know that you will understand that the safety of everyone in the school community is paramount. We all want to get more pupils back into school as soon as it is safe to do so. However, in supporting schools to re-open in a phased and gradual way, the first priority to consider will be the health and well-being of all pupils and families and the staff.

Whilst all schools are working hard to respond to the guidance provided by the Department for Education, depending on each individual school context, some primary, infant and junior schools may not be able to offer full time provision for the relevant year groups, and any new arrangements may not be introduced exactly from the 1st June. Schools will be writing to parents over the next week to outline the offer and response that they are able to make, which will be based on the health and safety risk assessment that they have been asked to complete.

The guidance made it clear that it is not compulsory for parents to send their children to school at this time and there will be no penalties if you choose to keep your child(ren) at home.

All schools will continue to provide a home learning offer to all pupils not accessing support on site and will also keep in regular touch with the families of all pupils, whether or not they are attending school.

Further information for parents and carers can be found in the attached government guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/closure-of-educational-settings-information-for-parents-and-carers/reopening-schools-and-other-educational-settings-from-1-june>

If you are the parent of a child with an Education, Health and Care Plan we will also be writing to you in the next week, via your child's school or setting, to update you on the temporary changes made by the government to the SEND legislation and what this means for your child. We will also be sharing this information via the Local Offer and the Essex Family Forum.

I want to assure you that schools are working closely with the Local Authority and the Headteacher Associations in order to offer a consistent and safe response to the proposed plans.

Finally, I would like to reassure you that the health and safety of children and staff remains everyone's first priority during this period.

If you have any questions regarding this letter, please do contact your school in the first instance.

Thank you for your continued co-operation at this time.

Kind regards,



Clare Kershaw
Director of Education

Sent on behalf of:
Essex County Council
The Association of Secondary Headteachers in Essex
Essex Primary Headteacher Association
Essex Special Schools Education Trust