



To All Headteachers

Children, Young People and Education

County Hall
Sessions House
Maidstone
ME14 1XQ

Phone: 03000 414989

Ask for: David Adams

Email: David.adams@kent.gov.uk

Date: 4 January 2021

Dear Colleague

Reopening of Schools in Term 3

I appreciate that many of you would not have been able to get the type of break you were hoping for over the festive period due to the number of government announcements made towards the end of term two and subsequently throughout last week.

As we start term three, a number of key issues have already materialised and this letter will hopefully provide you with some clarity on KCC's position and response to recent events.

Decision not to delay the full reopening for All Kent Primary schools

As highlighted in my letter of 31st December 2020, the Government has implemented its contingency framework and decreed that primary schools in Kent, with the exception of those in the districts of Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone & Hythe, will not open to face to face learning on 4th January, but will operate remote learning for the majority of pupils. Vulnerable pupils and children of critical workers can attend from today.

This has caused considerable debate, which continues across a number of forums and political arenas. Over the weekend the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills wrote to the Secretary of State for Education arguing that we feel all Kent Primary Schools should be on the contingency framework currently and be providing remote learning until at least the 18th January, and requesting that he reconsider his decision. LAs have today been informed of a new application process to enable them to request changes to areas on the Contingency Framework, however we have been informed that our request is being considered at Bronze Command later today. As you know the Secretary of State retains the powers to order the opening or closing of schools; this is not a power LAs have.

I am well aware that colleagues in primary schools that should be open to all pupils are under pressure from all sides of their school communities. I understand the Secretary of State is responding to teaching unions today, advising that in his view their action is unlawful. In view of Kent's position that currently all its primary school should be included

on the contingency framework, and that Headteacher's professional associations are also making challenges to Government, we would recommend a non-adversarial line is taken over the next few days towards staff submitting s44 letters. We will issue more detailed advice shortly.

Schools that should be open to the majority of pupils should consider the impact of staff absences and union action on their ability to operate effectively and through robust risk assessment determine whether it is safe for their school to remain open to all pupils. If based on such assessments, a decision is taken by a Head Teacher to revert to remote learning for the majority of their pupils, KCC will support that decision in the current circumstances. We do expect all schools to maintain provision for vulnerable learners and children of key workers.

Support for Children of Key Workers and School Opening Times

Whilst we understand that schools are trying to restrict numbers of pupils accessing the school at this time to support the fight to reduce transmission of the virus, I need again to clarify the DfE guidance on provision for key workers. This does not stipulate that both parents must be key workers. Therefore, I ask that if you are placing such restrictions on families accessing your school, please reconsider this.

Additionally, we have been informed that a number of schools have adjusted the timing of the school day, thereby restricting the time supporting key worker children which is impacting on staff in other schools, on teachers delivering remote learning, and on partner agencies, particularly the NHS. I request that you consider this when establishing your provision. Wraparound provision, including before and after school clubs, can continue to operate in all primary schools; for those primary schools within the contingency framework area attendance is restricted to children of critical workers and vulnerable children until the 18th January. Whilst schools are not required to continue to operate these provisions, both we and the DfE would ask schools consider the implications for parents who are critical workers and the impact on vulnerable children if these provisions are to cease and encourage provisions to continue where schools are able to safely operate for those that need them.

The latest DfE guidance regarding Key Workers can be found here: [children of critical workers](#).

School Transport

As also highlighted in my letter of 31st December, transport provision has remained in place for secondary age students to ensure any student needing to attend to sit a public exam is able to do so. While we are keen to ensure that all students can attend school as necessary, it is inefficient to maintain normal transport arrangements where they are not required. We would therefore request again that schools confirm to homeschooltransport@kent.gov.uk the details of students taking exams (full name and DOB) and the dates of these exams to enable us to map this against transport routes.

Free school transport is provided on a much smaller scale for primary aged pupils and so arrangements have been made to suspend transport for pupils attending schools in the areas of Kent where Government has closed all Primary schools to the majority of pupils. If schools are aware of individual cases where this is limiting a child's ability to attend school as necessary, please contact homeschooltransport@kent.gov.uk with the child's details, so that alternative arrangements can be made.

Free school transport remains unchanged for children attending Special schools, unless KCC has been informed that transport is not currently required. Schools should inform clienttransport@kent.gov.uk if they are aware of any unnecessary transport than can be temporarily withdrawn, providing the child's details and the date that transport can be postponed until.

While school transport remains available across Kent, we have been made aware that Covid has caused a significant driver shortfall for some providers, which has required alternative arrangements to be made. If schools are informed of individual cases where children's transport arrangements are not operating as expected, please follow normal procedures to let KCC know.

Closure Website

I want to thank all schools for their engagements in providing both the Local Authority and DfE with updates on attendance and action taken in respect of COVID-19 cases. I know this is a considerable additional burden that is placed on you during these difficult and confusing times. However, please continue to make these returns. Without the data we cannot appropriately articulate to Government the pressures on Kent's schools.

Please also remember that the KCC Closure Website should be updated if your school is expected to be open to the majority of pupils but for whatever reason you have had to partially close or close to all but vulnerable and key worker children. Now we have a range of different scenarios for schools across Kent we need to accurately capture the current status of each school. You will be aware that this is a very quick process and can be done using computer, tablet or even mobile phone.

If you have any difficulties, logging into the website which can be accessed here: <https://www.kentclosures.co.uk>, please contact your Area Education Officer in the first instance.

It is clear the situation continues to change rapidly. I will provide further information as this becomes available.

Yours sincerely



David Adams
Interim Director of Education