



To: All Headteachers

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Ask For: Mr Matt Dunkley
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Dear Colleague

As we end the second week since Infant, Junior and Primary schools have welcomed back additional pupils, resulting in over 20,000 primary aged children attending school in Kent, it is worth relaying some feedback we have received from you.

Headteachers have told us that the return to school has gone more smoothly than anticipated. Pupils are, in the main, happy to be back, staff and parent confidence has grown. It is pleasing that this is also the message we have been receiving from professional associations. Parents too have been writing supportively to us and praising the work of school staff. I recognise that many people will still be anxious, but as pupil numbers in schools rise progressively, the next “new normal” will prevail. The numbers in schools were 32% of the Year 6 cohort, 21% of Year 1s, and 27% of year Rs.

The Royal College of Paediatric Child Health this week published a revised set of guidance on which groups of children should be shielded based on the latest clinical evidence. The group is now smaller than previously advised. It is our understanding that clinical practitioners will now use this guidance on a case by case basis to decide whether, on the balance of risks, a child should be advised to continue to shield. Ultimately, it will be for their GP to remove them from the shielding list. Over time, this will impact on the ongoing risk assessments for children returning to school, particularly those in Special Schools.

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-shielding-guidance-children-young-people>

I mentioned earlier this week that we are looking at scenarios relating to the wider opening of schools, and I would like to tell you a little more about this. However, it would be helpful if I set this in a context. Daily, officers in the LA are talking to headteachers and groups of headteachers, for example via the KAH task and finish groups. Many of you feel we are providing valued support and guidance, and I am pleased that this is your feeling. However, we also hear views that the LA is being too directive, and the opposite, that we should be more directive and tell schools what

to do more. I am sure you will understand our slight frustration at being damned if we do and damned if we don't.

We have consistently taken the position that we will help headteachers to plan for whatever we, and you, are being asked to plan for. The uncertainty at National level will, in all likelihood, continue to play out. While we are engaged with conversations at National level and hope our counsel is listened to, we are not in control of the decisions made by Government.

Therefore, we would be unwise to issue edicts in advance of Government decisions which create problems for schools should these prove to be inconsistent with Government guidance when that is received, and to do so cuts across the autonomy many schools hold dear. By issuing guidance, our aim is to provide a framework for schools to follow, which helps to provide the consistency many are asking for.

The Government no longer expects all primary year groups to have had opportunity to attend school before the summer holidays but are encouraging schools that have the capacity to accept more primary pupils to do so. We know that some schools have already made the decision to do this. Gavin Williamson announced to Parliament that the DfE is producing guidance to support this which will include advice regarding prioritisation of that capacity. The reopening of wider parts of the economy from next week is likely to increase the demand for provision from critical workers and any plans to admit further year groups will need to take this in to account.

In terms of our scenario planning for the next stages of return to school we are concentrating on four strands of what may happen in September. We of course cannot predict what the final government plan will be.

Summer provision - the Government's stated position has been that it is not going to ask schools to open over the summer holiday period. That position may change. We are looking at how childcare provision can be provided for key worker children during the summer. Next week we are expecting the Government to release details of a *catch-up programme* which has now been mentioned by Ministers and the Prime Minister on a number of occasions in response to questions regarding the summer holidays.

A return for all - you will have seen the National discussion about using other buildings, marquees, etc. Also, the discussions about social distancing distances continues. We are looking at these and related options for how, if required, all pupils could be in schools in September. We recognise there are constraints, staffing being the most obvious.

Blended learning - how we best support the mix of school based and home learning, especially improving the digital offer for those with least access.

Shift systems schools - this was seriously considered a decade ago when the Building Schools for the Future programme was operating Nationally. It would address the capacity issue, but not the staffing.

We are clear that there is not likely to be one solution, and all have significant challenges. The needs of primary, secondary and special schools are different, as are the circumstances of individual schools. No matter what decision is made by Government I know that schools will again rise to the challenge and we will support you in doing so.

Secondary colleagues have spent the last few weeks preparing to welcome back Year 10 and 12's for some face to face contact from next week, this has been a significant task and I know that many had to significantly alter their plans following the publication of Government guidance. I am sure that your hard work will be reflected in a successful partial opening for these young people.

Now that Year 6 are reintegrating back into school, thoughts are turning to transition to their secondary setting. In the current climate we are recommending the normal transition day in July does not take place. Secondary schools have been proactive and have taken steps to start the transition process. The KCC guidance gives a list of suggestions as to how this transition can be managed, subject to risk assessment. We support headteachers to make the necessary arrangements and encourage them to contact their AEO and SIA if there are any specific issues. We encourage secondary schools to start the process and if they have not already done so, contact their feeder primary schools in order that Year 6 students are as prepared as possible to start their new school in September.

Finally, next week please look out for information that the Fair Access Team will send directly to schools regarding the Kent Test.

Yours sincerely



Matt Dunkley
Corporate Director
Children, Young People and Education