

Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
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19 May 2020

To all Parents and Carers of primary aged pupils attending schools in Stockton-on-Tees

As you will be aware, the Prime Minister announced on Sunday 10th May that schools can start to admit more pupils from 1 June at the earliest, for children in nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6. This is based on an assessment of available evidence and data that more children can return to school, if numbers are limited, and a series of protective measures are introduced to prevent transmission.

We are writing to set out the approach in Stockton-on-Tees to this announcement, and in response to the Government guidance which has been issued in the week since the announcement. The Council has been working with school leaders to seek their views on admitting more pupils, and schools in the borough have been planning for such a phased return for some time. They have also, of course, been open for children of key workers and for 'vulnerable' children throughout, and have done an amazing job not only in supporting these children, but keeping in contact with those not attending, and in delivering home learning.

Based on the evidence available, very small numbers of children are seriously affected by Coronavirus and children are not known to transmit the virus any more readily or less readily than adults. Government guidance acknowledges that it is not possible to maintain the strict social distancing we have all experienced in our lives throughout the lockdown period. Therefore, the Government has suggested a range of measures to schools to consider as part of their planning, such as staggered opening times, enhanced cleansing and washing and smaller groups of pupils.

All schools take their responsibilities to educate children and keep them safe seriously, and we are aware that this is going to be a difficult balance to achieve – many children will benefit significantly from being back in school. All schools are undertaking risk assessments based on the guidance to determine their own decisions on when they will be able to welcome more children back into school.

All schools are different. Their buildings and layout, and the extent to which their staffing group has been affected all vary. There can be no standard template or standard decision about admitting more pupils. We do expect therefore that arrangements will be different in different schools. Many will open to different year groups at different times, when they are ready to do so. Schools will need to adapt teaching spaces and communal areas. Children may not have the same teachers as usual, or be in the same groups or be taught with their friends, as schools aim to keep groups of children together in 'bubbles' throughout the day.

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Some schools will be ready to admit more pupils from 1 June, and some will not be. For that reason, we do not consider it necessary to set out an alternative timescale for schools to admit more pupils than has been set out nationally. Our expectation is that this will be slow, gradual, and subject to constant monitoring. 1 June is not a target for all schools to 're-open' but the start of a gradual process, in line with national guidance and evidence. If schools are not ready to admit more pupils, then we will support that position, and of course usual approaches to managing attendance (including fines for non-attendance) continue to be suspended.

Your school will keep in touch with you about their plans, and in particular will want your views about your intentions to send children to school so that they can plan as effectively as possible. Many schools will close, at least partially in half term week, to enable them to deep clean and complete health and safety checks.

These are not easy decisions. We fully appreciate the concerns you will have about whether this is the right time to be sending your child back to school. We know our schools want pupils back in school, but Headteachers will only take decisions about admitting more pupils when they are assured that appropriate safety measures and arrangements are in place, and that working arrangements in school, and for pick up and drop off are appropriate.

We have outstanding school leaders in Stockton-on-Tees and we trust their judgement to make the right decisions for the safety and wellbeing of children, based on thorough risk assessment. We also give our assurance that the Council will do all we can to work with our schools to support the safe return of children to school.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Bob Cook
Leader of Stockton-on -Tees Borough Council



Martin Gray
Director of Children's Services