

2 March 2021

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Dear parent/carers

We recognise that the last few months have been hard due to the most recent lockdown measures, gloomy winter days and the challenges of home schooling. We would like to thank all parent/carers for the role you have played in supporting home learning. We understand how challenging this has been and are delighted that children and young people will be welcomed back to school from 8 March 2021. Primary aged pupils are due to return to school full time on 8 March, whereas pupils in Year 7 and above are due to return week commencing 8 March. Your school/college will confirm the specific arrangements.

Schools and colleges are looking forward to welcoming children and young people back and have worked hard to ensure that they are ready for their return by carefully planning, reviewing their risk assessments and safety measures. We know the incidence rate in children and young people continues to fall, and we are currently less than 48 cases in every 100,000 in ages 0-19. We ask all adults dropping children off and collecting pupils to ensure they socially distance at school gates to reduce any potential transmission by adults.

All schools have received increased training in understanding and supporting pupil's mental health and well-being over the past term and are able to help pupils who are experiencing difficulties in this area. We know some parent/carers will be feeling anxious about the return to school or college. If you have concerns about your child/children attending, you should discuss these with your school or college. They should be able to explain ways they are adapting to reduce risks and the ways in which they can support your child/children.

The government also announced over the weekend that testing will be extended to whole families and households with primary school, secondary school and college age children, including childcare and support bubbles. Households will be able to test themselves twice every week from home as schools return from 8 March. Tests will be available to order and collect from local sites or administered through workplace testing programmes. More information will be provided on how to access these as the information becomes available.

Your school/college will have been in touch to let you know if there are any new measures in place. We have set out below some of the key arrangements that have been put in place to support the return to school.

All Schools and colleges

Attendance: All children of compulsory school age must attend school regularly from 8 March. Secondary aged pupil should attend full time according to your school /college phased return during week commencing 8 March.

Transport: School transport will be operational from 8 March. In exceptional circumstances it may be that changes may need to be made, for example if the usual driver is self-isolating, but parent/carers will be informed as soon as possible if this is the case. It is important that the current national guidelines for COVID19 are followed outside of school, including walking to and from school, so please encourage your child/ren to follow these.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND): It is so important that all children with SEND return to school/college. If a phased return is required to enable your child to transition back to school this should be agreed in discussion and agreement between parent/carers and the school/college. We would expect full time attendance to be achieved as soon as possible. In such cases we encourage you to contact your school/college SENCO. In exceptional circumstances where an agreement cannot be made please contact;- EHCPCOVID19Schoolplaces@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Self-isolation: One of the most effective ways of reducing the spread of the virus is to ensure that any child or young person who develops coronavirus symptoms or has a positive test does not attend school/college. They must also self-isolate and follow government guidelines if any member of their household has symptoms or tests positive. Schools will continue close contact tracing of any positive cases who have attended school. If your child is identified as a close contact, they will be asked to isolate to reduce any potential transmission in school. Your support with self-isolation is essential to keep all staff and pupils safe.

Significant changes for pupils in year 7 and above.

There are a couple of significant changes in relation to measures that apply to pupils in year 7 and above which are set out below. **You are encouraged support your school/college with these additional measures** as this will help to reduce the potential risk of transmission in school and therefore reduce the number of children and young people who are required to isolate.

Lateral Flow Testing: Young people (year 7 and above) **will be strongly encouraged to take part in regular testing.** Testing is voluntary and parent/carer consent will be required before testing takes place. Pupils will be asked to take their first test before they return to school. Pupils may be asked to attend school for their first test week commencing 1 March to enable a return on 8 March or you may be given a phased start date during week commencing 8 March. This allows individuals with coronavirus (COVID-19) who do not have symptoms to be identified and to isolate therefore reducing potential transmission in school/college. You will be asked to take three tests in school/college by 19 March, where possible. After that home test kits will be provided, and you will be asked to conduct two home tests per week and notify the school/college of the outcome of the test. Your child will not be stopped from returning to school or college if you choose not to be tested or are not able to undertake a test.

Your school/college will let you know of the specific arrangements for your child's test. The following link shows how to take the test and we recommend you watch this with your child so that you both understand what is involved. [Step by step guide to COVID19 testing. If you are unable to access this guide do not worry as school/college will supervise the first three tests to ensure you understand what is required before you start to home test](#)

Any child of young person **not** undergoing testing **should still attend school in line with the phased return arrangements** of the school/college.

Face coverings: It has previously been expected that face coverings should be worn (unless exempt) when moving around the premises, outside of classrooms, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. **The Department for Education now also recommends that face coverings should be worn in classrooms and during activities, unless social distancing can be maintained.** This will not apply in situations where a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity, for example PE lessons.

The wearing of face coverings in classrooms is being introduced for a limited time until Easter. **We ask that you discuss this with your child and encourage them to follow the guidance provided by your school or college** as per their risk assessment.

Finally, we appreciate that you and your child/children have experienced significant disruption to your everyday lives over the past year. Therefore, it is great news that we can now welcome children and young people back to school and college. It will remain vitally important that we do all that we can, together with schools and colleges, to ensure that children and young people return to face to face teaching as we know that this is vital for their educational progress, for their wellbeing, and for their wider development.

We thank you for your continued support and look forward to all children and young people returning to school/college. **If you have any queries about return to school arrangements, please contact your school/college direct.**

Yours faithfully



Jacky Forster
Director of Education and 14-19 Skills



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