

Paul Wagstaff
Director of Education and Skills

County Hall
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28th May 2020

Dear Parent or Carer

I know that you may be one of many who have questions or anxieties about the impending phased return to school widely communicated by the government, and which our schools are planning for at this time.

It is important that any phased return to school is managed safely and that each school has carefully planned its phased return in a way which works for them, and in line with the risk assessments they are undertaking. I am sure that you will agree that we need to put safety for staff and children first.

The phased return will look different in different schools. This is because our schools are different in size, context and staffing. A 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate. The government have suggested that priority continues to be given to the children of key workers, the vulnerable, and those with EHCPs, irrespective of their year group. We agree and strongly support our schools in prioritising these groups as well as those who may be disadvantaged. Where the government have suggested particular year groups in this phased return, due to the demand for places in some schools, it may not be possible for each of these year groups to return, certainly in the short term. It could also be that parental demand for places exceeds the capacity that schools can currently manage. I recognise that this will be a disappointment for some parents and children.

Whilst the phased return has been announced as starting no earlier than 1st June for primary schools or the 15th June for secondary schools, it similarly does not mean that the phased return will be to full time schooling or indeed that all the key year groups return at the same time. Decisions being made by schools involve careful consideration of the implications on how the return can be safe. It would not be unusual for schools to be looking at part-time return in some year groups, at least initially. As a local authority, we have agreed some guiding principles with our schools to support their decision making in managing a phased return, and have been working with our school leaders to ensure that these decisions are taken with full account of the local situation.

Our schools, and both staff and governors have been exemplary over the last two and a half months, trying to manage a difficult and often changing situation but, doing what they can to support our key worker children and our most vulnerable. Attendance in our schools in West Sussex has been above that seen nationally and almost all our schools have remained open throughout, including through school holidays.

We all want to get this right for our children and recognise that many of our children and are keen to return to school. Our headteachers will continue to keep parents and families informed as things develop but they may still have to give messages that may not be what all parents or children wish to hear. However, these messages will have been carefully based on their individual situation.

I thank you for your support and patience.

Yours sincerely

Paul Wagstaff

Director of Education and Skills