

Our Ref:CD/KW

Date: 19<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear Parent/Carer/Guardian,

We are writing to update you about Worcestershire's approach following the recent government announcement about the wider re-opening of schools.

We are aware that the last 8 weeks have been very difficult for many families. Along with the loss of routine, families have had to get used to home schooling alongside worries for our own, family and friends' health and wellbeing. The Prime Minister's speech on 10<sup>th</sup> May signalled an ambition for a wider opening of schools for primary aged children from 1<sup>st</sup> June at the earliest, specifically focusing on reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils. We thought it would be helpful to set out the approach we are taking, working with schools and settings, to ensure the work is rigorously planned.

We are in contact with the Department for Education (DfE) and have emphasised that our approach is rooted in doing the right thing for children, families and schools, ensuring that children return to school when it is safe for them and the staff in their schools. We appreciate the importance of education at this young age and are keen to minimise the impact of its loss, and we are committed to striving for the right balance in achieving the return.

We are working very closely with a group of school leaders and other colleagues to plan for the future. We have agreed together a number of principles that support the basis of recovery, and we list the most relevant for primary wider opening below:

- The highest priority and consideration is the safety and wellbeing of Worcestershire's children, young people, families and staff.
- Reducing the risk of infection and following Public Health England and DfE guidance is key to any risk assessment and further actions
- Increasing the attendance for vulnerable children along with the children of critical workers will continue to be a priority
- The reopening and inclusion for reception, year 1 and year 6 pupils will be risk assessed and decisions about timing, phasing and management made, based on the outcomes of risk assessments
- Schools and settings will assess building capacity and spaces and utilising protective measures decide on group sizes up to a maximum of 15 pupils in the first instance

You will appreciate that each school is different so this work will be carefully undertaken by each school depending on their own circumstances, undertaking the risk assessment and working with governing bodies, trust boards and the local authority to support decision making. It is important to note that 1<sup>st</sup> June may not be the date when the wider opening happens depending upon this work and your child's school will let you know as soon as possible their plan for welcoming more children. We hope that sharing the approach to this work will help you to feel more informed as well as more confident in the thorough risk assessment being undertaken.

We have been incredibly appreciative of the work that schools and settings have done since 23<sup>rd</sup> March, remaining open for the children of critical workers and vulnerable children as well as supporting virtual learning for pupils. We hope that you can understand and support our approach to planning for the future, even though we do not have the answers to all the questions you might have. We are confident that our approach will enable us to plan for a sustainable wider opening and ask that you support your child's school, teaching and support staff whilst carrying out this important work.

Yours faithfully,



**Dr Catherine Driscoll**  
**Director of Children's Services**

**Cllr Marcus Hart**  
**Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**