

Parents/Carers in Brighton & Hove

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e-mail: Deb.Austin@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Dear parents and carers,

We understand this is a worrying time and that many of you are facing pressures at home and work since the government introduced restrictions to prevent the spread of COVID 19.

Thank you for all you are doing to support your child's learning under such unusual circumstances.

The council has been working closely with headteachers across the city during the current pandemic. As you know, the government restrictions which came into force in March saw schools close for almost all pupils.

Last month the government asked schools to prepare to open to more pupils at the start of June. Infant and primary schools are asked to take in Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils. Secondary schools are asked to provide face to face support for young people in Year 10 and 12 during this summer term.

During the pandemic, schools have remained open to provide childcare for children of keyworkers and vulnerable children, including during school holidays. The numbers of those eligible for a place who are attending school have doubled since the restrictions came in and this is welcomed. Measures are in place to manage this as the number of pupils involved remains a tiny fraction of the whole school population.

The council advice to Brighton & Hove schools and council nurseries remains that they should not open more widely for pupils at this time.

This position against wider opening is based on considered advice received today from our public health colleagues. We are advised there is not sufficient reassurance that the Government's 5 key tests have all been met locally.

The government's five tests:

1. Making sure the NHS can cope
2. A sustained and consistent fall in the daily death rate from coronavirus
3. Rate of infection decreasing to manageable levels

4. Ensuring supply of tests and PPE can meet future demand
5. Being confident that any adjustments will not risk a second peak of infections that would overwhelm the NHS.

In particular, the Test and Trace programme is still in its early days. It is not yet providing sufficient data in Brighton & Hove to show that the city can rely on the programme to respond to any potential local increases in cases and outbreaks. We know local cases are being reported and identified to the programme and we are likely to see numbers of cases rise in the weeks ahead as a result. More time is needed to understand the local implications.

We are keen to see more children return to schools and nurseries as soon as possible to benefit from vital face-to-face education and social interaction. We recognise the work being done by schools to deliver home learning so well across the city. We also appreciate the difficulties families and learners are facing with the continued need for many to remain at home. This situation will be kept under daily review and your schools will be in contact with you about their plans.

As a parent or carer, we appreciate that you may have very real concerns about your child returning to school. The government has said clearly that parents and carers will not be fined if they choose not to send their children to school at this time.

When pupils return to school, the experience will be different from before the pandemic began as we all learn how to live alongside Covid-19. Schools are doing everything possible to reduce risks. This means measures such as physical distancing, staggered school times and extra hygiene will be in place.

The final decision on whether to open an individual school lies with the head teacher, in consultation with the chair of governors, but we would encourage schools to follow our advice. We also are offering support to all schools and encourage the preparation of wider opening plans so we can all be ready to respond swiftly and appropriately when needed.

This continues to be a challenging year. I would like to thank all parents and carers for everything that has been done to support the children and young people of the city during the pandemic.

Yours faithfully,



Deb Austin
Interim Executive Director, Families, Children & Learning.