

21st May 2020

To all parents and carers of primary aged pupils attending schools in Middlesbrough

On Sunday May 10 the Prime Minister announced that schools can start to admit nursery, reception, year 1 and year 6 children from June 1.

We are writing to explain the approach schools in Middlesbrough are taking to this announcement. The Council has been working with school leaders to seek their views on admitting more pupils and schools are now planning for this while continuing to be open for vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

Further guidance which followed the Prime Minister's announcement identified that Special Schools will work towards a phased return of more children and young people without a focus on specific year groups.

All school staff have worked tirelessly and are doing superb work in supporting children, delivering home learning and staying in touch with children not in school.

Some schools will be ready to admit more pupils from June 1, others will not. For that reason, we do not consider it necessary to set out an alternative timescale for Middlesbrough schools to admit more pupils than has been set out nationally.

Our expectation is that this will be subject to constant monitoring. June 1 is not a target for all schools to admit more children but the start of a gradual process which will be carried out in line with national guidance and evidence; if schools are not ready to admit more pupils, then we will support that position.

School leaders are currently undertaking risk assessments based on the Government guidance to determine their own decisions on how and when they will be able to welcome more children back into school. We recognise that many children will benefit from being back at school and all schools are doing all that they can to make this possible while keeping pupils safe.

The Government has provided schools with advice and guidance which outlines a range of measures they can consider as part of their planning. These include: staggered opening times, increased cleaning and hand-washing and working with smaller groups of pupils.

All schools are different. Their buildings, layout and staffing levels vary. There can be no standard way of admitting more pupils. Therefore we do not expect that arrangements will be the same in all schools. When they are ready to do so, schools may open to different year groups at different times. Schools will need to adapt teaching spaces and communal areas. Children may not have the same teachers as usual, be in the same groups or be taught with their friends. Schools aim to make arrangements to keep groups of children together in 'bubbles' throughout the day to limit contact with others. In addition, the usual approaches to managing attendance (including fines for non-attendance) continue to be suspended.

Your child's school will keep in touch with you about their plans and in particular will want your views about your intention to send your child to school so that they can plan as effectively as possible.

We fully appreciate the concerns you will have about whether this is the right time to send your child back to school. We know our schools want children to return, but school leaders will only take decisions about admitting more pupils when they are assured that appropriate safety measures are in place and that working arrangements in school, including those for picking up and dropping off children, are appropriate.

We recognise that these are unprecedented times. Middlesbrough's school leaders are focussed on making the right decisions about the safety and wellbeing of children, based on thorough risk assessment. As a Council we are committed to continuing to work collaboratively with schools to support the safe return of children to school.

Yours faithfully



Sue Butcher
Director of Children's Services



Rob Brown
Director of Education, Prevention and Partnerships