

**2 March 2021**

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Dear parent/carer

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.

**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](mailto: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.

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**

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