



## **Directorate for Children's Services Children's Social Care**

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Dear Parents and Carers,

We have been living in unprecedented times since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. In writing to you I wanted to look back at the last few months and also set out more detail on the plans for return to education in schools and early years settings in September.

### **Thank you to all our schools and settings**

Firstly I want to say how grateful we are to all our schools, early years and childcare settings across Buckinghamshire. Our dedicated staff have gone above and beyond in so many ways to support our children; staying open where possible throughout the lockdown period to continue to provide care and learning to our vulnerable children and children of key workers, as well as offering alternative learning options for most other children who have stayed at home. We thank all school and early years leaders, staff, nursery owners, committees, governors and trustees for their monumental efforts.

### **The safety of children and staff is our priority**

Through the last few months since the start of the closure period in March, we know and understand that each school and setting's opening arrangements have differed. This has been for a range of reasons, for example the number and size of learning spaces available and staffing availability. In all of this decision-making, the overriding priority for everyone has been the safety of children and staff.

As a council we have worked closely with schools and early years settings to take account of these variances and ensure as much consistency as possible in the approach to education and learning.

We know that some schools have been able to open for more children and wider year groups than the government's specified priority year groups; and that some early years settings have been able to open for many of their children across the whole 0 – 5 years age range. We very much appreciate the flexibility shown by all educational and childcare settings and are supporting those that are able to provide this additional learning. We also recognise that all schools and settings are different and therefore understand why wider opening has not been possible for everyone.

It is important to clarify though that there is no directive or expectation for schools that this wider provision must be offered over and above the return to school for [prioritised year groups set out in the government guidance](#).

### **Support for students continues**

Thank you to our primary schools that opened at the beginning of June for the key year groups, Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils, who were prioritised by the government to return first.

Thank you also to our secondary schools that have in the last two weeks opened to offer Year 10 and Year 12 students some face-to-face support to supplement their remote education, in advance of the key exams they are due to take next year.

I also want to thank our SEND schools that have welcomed all vulnerable and key worker children since 23 March and have been open to all their year groups since 1 June. This has been invaluable support to some of our most vulnerable children.

It is very important that schools and early years settings continue to provide support and education for vulnerable children and children of key workers, and schools will prioritise this in their ongoing planning.

### **Summer holiday arrangements**

We do not expect Buckinghamshire schools to open over the summer holidays, so the school summer break will take place as usual. It is important that we look after our school staff and protect their wellbeing after what has been a difficult time, and the school holiday break will allow this support to happen.

This means that after the summer holidays schools will be prepared and ready to support all students to be able to catch up on their learning and resume their education an accelerated rate from the start of the new academic year in September.

### **School opening from September**

The Secretary of State for Education set out in his [announcement on 19 June](#) the government's ambition for all pupils to return to school in September.

The position in September is likely to be different to where we are now. However there will be a lot of consideration needed to enable this full return to school to happen and we are supporting our schools in the planning process to make sure that schools are able to welcome all pupils back in September in the safest way possible. In doing this we are following all of the advice available for local authorities and schools from the government and Public Health England.

Your school will provide more detail to you on September opening in due course. Parents of children transitioning to nursery or school in September will also be given information by their new school regarding their opening in due course.

### **Thank you to all parents and carers**

Finally, I want to thank all of you as parents and carers for the support you have shown to your schools, your settings and of course your children. This period will have been incredibly difficult for parents and carers, children and young people and families alike. The closure of schools and early years settings, combined with the government restrictions, have all been disruptive in a variety of ways.

For parents and carers, we understand the significant challenges of keeping up learning at home while also juggling work, care for family members, loss or grief in some instances, financial worries and general concern about the pandemic. Thank you for being patient, understanding and supportive during this unparalleled situation.

Yours faithfully

Simon



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