



20 May 2020

Dear Headteacher

Phased wider opening of Cheshire East schools, colleges and early years settings

We are writing to you to set out the Cheshire East approach to the wider opening of schools, colleges and early years settings. Cabinet members have considered the various concerns raised by early years settings, schools, parents and unions and propose that a careful and staged approach is taken to the wider opening of schools from 1 June. **We are asking that all education settings across Cheshire East follow this advice.** We will continue to listen and monitor the situation and reserve judgement to issue revised advice if evidence suggests this is needed.

In developing this approach, we have taken on board views of representatives from early years colleagues, primary and secondary schools (with a mix of maintained and academies), the Dioceses, Trade Unions, Parent Carer Forum and the Department of Education. In summary all have commented that the approach being recommended is sensible and sound.

Covid-19 has brought with it stress, uncertainty and anxiety for us all. We need to make sure any return to early years settings, schools and colleges is safe for children's physical and emotional well-being. All schools need to ensure they have in place their risk assessment and have put in place all the necessary changes to policy, practice and physical environment with clear briefings and communication for staff, parents and children. We therefore recommend that from 1 June schools take 2 weeks to ensure they are confident with the arrangements and for staff to be familiar with new working practices. There will then be a phased return of additional pupils from 15 June.

Our priority is to make sure that any way forward is safe for everyone within our schools. We have ensured that all schools and colleges across Cheshire East have an initial supply of PPE and these will be delivered to all schools and colleges in advance of any wider opening. We ask early years settings, schools and colleges carefully plan for social distancing and take time to train staff in new working practice. In classrooms we advise that groups should be a maximum of 15 as stated by the Department for Education but should be less than this where needed to allow for desks to be 2m apart.

It is clear that any return for children and young people will not look the same as before Covid-19, as the pandemic has changed things for us all both in the short and longer term. There will need to be consideration of how we best support children and young people through this period. We want to ensure that appropriate time is provided to enable schools to develop and put in place their plans. The Local Authority will continue to provide support for any school that feels they will have difficulty implementing the changes.

We are working closely with the Cheshire East Parent Carer Forum to consider the approach to a phased starting back for children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan ensuring it is safe and appropriate based on an individual risk assessment for each child. Similarly, social workers will agree the phased return of children and young people they support with schools and parents.

There will be no pressure on parents to send their children to an early years setting, school or college and no fines applied to parents who decide to not send their children to school although we would encourage early years settings, schools and colleges to share with parents the safety measures they have in place so

OFFICIAL

that they can make an informed decision. You should encourage parents to support this approach and consider how their child may start to transition back in to their education setting.

We are very aware of the anxiety of parents, children and young people and staff in early years settings, schools and colleges and once again we can assure you that we will only move to a wider opening of schools where we are confident that the risk management arrangements and planning that has been put in place make it safe to do so.

The local arrangements are set out in Appendix 1 and we will publish any changes on the council website www.cheshireeast.gov.uk

In the meantime, please stay safe



Jacky Forster
Director of Education
Families



Mark Palethorpe
Executive Director of People

Cllr Kathryn Flavell
Portfolio Holder for Children and

Appendix 1: Cheshire East Approach to phased wider opening of schools, colleges and early years settings.

We are proposing that the wider opening of schools, colleges and early years settings will take place from the 1st June but in a phased approach to enable pupils and staff to manage the implementation of significant changes to working practice with smaller numbers of pupils. Only increasing the number of pupils as confidence develops and new working practices become embedded.

The approach will be monitored, and we reserve judgement to make changes if further guidance or evidence suggests changes need to be made.

There will be no pressure on parents to send their children to school, college or early years setting and no fines applied to parents who decide to not send their children to school although we would encourage schools to share with parents the safety measures they have in place so that they can make an informed decision. Schools should encourage parents to support this approach and consider how their child may start to transition back in to their education setting.

For children with an Education, Health and Care Plan return to education will be discussed with individual parents with consideration about how best to support their child to return and the appropriate phasing of attendance.

Should any of the phases prove to need further time to settle this will be reviewed and change made to delay the next year group returning if appropriate.

Cheshire East phased approach to wider opening of schools

Early Years Setting

Week Commencing	School open to cater for following groups:
1 June	Children of Key Workers Vulnerable Groups* Staff preparing site, classrooms, and briefings and testing arrangements.
15 June	All eligible nursery aged pupils welcome but places limited based on space and staffing capacity.

Prioritisation of Nursery Places should be as follows:

- Children of Key Workers
- Eligible vulnerable Children (those who have a Social Worker or Family Service Worker) *
- Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan. *
- Other children based on enabling parents to return to work

** DfE are encouraging all eligible children to attend, they now advise it is no longer necessary for parents of eligible children to keep them at home if they can. However, there will be no pressure on parents that their children need to attend, although schools will share with parents the safety measures they have in place and encourage attendance.*

Primary Schools

Week Commencing	School open to cater for following groups:
1 June	Children of Key Workers Vulnerable Groups* Staff preparing site, classrooms, and briefings and testing arrangements.
15 June	Children of Key Workers Vulnerable Groups* All eligible nursery aged pupils welcome but places limited based on space and staffing capacity. (See above prioritisation)

	All Reception pupils
22 June	Children of Key Workers Vulnerable Groups* All eligible nursery aged pupils welcome but places limited based on space and staffing capacity. (See above prioritisation) All Reception pupils All Year 1 pupils
29 June	Children of Key Workers Vulnerable Groups* All eligible nursery aged pupils welcome but places limited based on space and staffing capacity. (See above prioritisation) All Reception pupils All Year 1 pupils Year 6 pupils – where the school still has enough space to do so with social distancing in place. This may vary between schools due to constraints of school buildings and staffing capacity. Schools should however as a minimum offer sessions to allow pupils to say goodbye, celebrate their achievements and support them in planning for transition
At this point we do not envisage a full return of all year groups by the end of the summer term.	

Secondary schools

Priority will be given to increasing places to Key Worker's children and eligible vulnerable children (those who have a Social Worker or Family Service Worker) with effect from 1 June. *

From 1 June, additional staff preparing site, classrooms, and briefings and testing new arrangements

A position on face to face contact for year 10 and 12 pupils will be considered on receipt of further guidance from the DfE due later this week. In the mean time we would expect any face to face contact to be by live on online conference calls.

Colleges

Colleges will offer where possible more face-to-face support for a small number of learners from 1st June on a risk assessed basis. Colleges have been providing learners with access to remote learning and will continue to do so over the coming months.

Special Schools

Pupils will be encouraged to return to school based on review of their individual risk assessment. Priority will be given to increasing places to Key Worker's children and eligible vulnerable children (those who have a Social Worker or Family Service Worker) with effect from 1 June. *

Schools will consider a phased approach to support a wider opening to children and young people which enables small groups to adjust to changes where this is appropriate from 15 June. Special Schools will steadily increase pupil numbers prioritising key transition groups. Schools will need to ensure social distances can be facilitated as far as possible, taking into consideration the staffing levels needed to support the pupils within each classroom.

Independent schools and alternative providers should follow the approach by phase of school above.

Out of borough schools are likely to need to follow their own local authority advice

