

22 June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers

Our local schools have continued to respond with creativity and commitment to managing the COVID-19 pandemic, and from the outset have supported places for children who are most vulnerable, and those whose families have been critical workers. We remain extremely grateful for all the fabulous work they have done and continue to do.

Since June, primary schools have opened to pupils in Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 and their offer has steadily grown. More than 3,000 primary school pupils in each borough are now at school. Secondary schools have also started to offer some face to face time in school and this is helping to re-engage students in Years 10 and 12. Our special schools have always been open, and each week increase the number of children and young people with special educational needs that can attend school.

We also know that, for children who are not in the prioritised year groups, the impact of not going to school since March, not seeing their friends, and missing direct teaching has been significant. There is no doubt that headteachers and their staff teams would invite every child back to school this term if they possibly could. Many families would welcome this too. Some individual primary schools may have the capacity to offer some provision to Years 2, 3, 4 and 5, but this needs to be after our vulnerable children, the children of critical workers and those children in the four prioritised year groups have been offered places.

Any new plans to bring back additional children will need to ensure there is sufficient space for social distancing and enough staff in school to support small groups of children to learn. The ability to admit additional children in Years 2, 3, 4 and 5 and Years 7, 8, 9 in secondary schools is an individual school decision and must be based on their ability to do this safely. Your own child's school will have been in touch with you if any plans are possible.

As we move towards the end of this term, the national ambition is to allow all children to return to school in September and this is something our school communities desperately want too. Initially, schools may not be able to offer full-time education provision for all children; however, schools are planning a range of options for September because any plan will depend on the continued improvement in controlling the COVID-19 virus over the summer. We, together with schools, are also waiting for Government guidance on this issue.

Last week the Government announced a national catch up programme which seeks to support gaps in pupils' learning as a result of schools being closed for a number of months. The details are yet to be finalised and we welcome any additional funding that schools can access to support a successful reintegration for all children and young people. We hope the funding will have sufficient flexibility to allow schools to use resources to make the biggest difference, because they know their individual children's learning needs well and what will work best for them as they catch up. Schools will have more details in the next few weeks and then be able to include this in their planning for the autumn term.

In addition, we are planning how we can support our children and families over the summer holiday period. The national announcement to provide food vouchers for families eligible for free school meals is one part of this, and we also hope to establish a summer learning offer, where children are able to access a range of activities to support their learning, physical activity, social and emotional needs. We will share details with schools in the next few weeks so that they can share it with you through their newsletters; we will also advertise it widely including on our websites, social media and through the voluntary sector and community networks

Finally, our sincere thanks to all those of you who have supported home learning over the past few months in many different ways, including through workbooks, online classrooms, virtual PE lessons and through play, discovering new things and learning together. There is no doubt that the past few months have been challenging for everyone, however, we hope our letter has reassured you that schools, with our support, are busy making plans for the next school year when we hope they will be able to welcome back all children and young people.

Yours sincerely



Charis Penfold
Director for Education Services



Ian Dodds
Director of Children's Services