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Date: 29th May 2020

Dear Parent

The Proposed Reopening of Schools in Northumberland

Earlier this month the Government set out its plans for schools in England to start to potentially reopen to more pupils at some point after 1st June, provided that the 5 key tests were met. Northumberland County Council has been working closely with Headteachers and school staff since the start of the closure period on 23rd March and will continue to do so throughout the proposed reopening period to ensure that where schools have indicated that they are planning to open to more pupils, it is done in a safe way that gives you both confidence and reassurance. We have told our schools that, whatever decisions they take in the interests of your children and their communities, they will be supported by Northumberland County Council and we know that our schools will only open if deemed safe to do so.

The Council recognises that all the staff in our schools have shown exceptional commitment and dedication in recent weeks. This has meant that the vast majority of our schools have remained open for vulnerable children and those of key workers throughout the coronavirus outbreak, including during school holidays and on the bank holidays.

Our schools have also taken innovative and exciting approaches to support your children with learning at home and have also made sure that where a family has needed additional help, they have been able to access food parcels, vouchers and other support.

There is no single method of reopening our schools in Northumberland and, given the size and location of some of our schools, each Headteacher and governing body will be taking a range of issues and circumstances into account when deciding what the next steps towards potential reopening are. What is clear is that as and when your child's school does eventually fully reopen, it will look different to how it looked when it closed and that this will be a different kind of 'school' for the children in the short and potentially medium term. Regardless of organisation, however, the safety of both your children and the staff in the school will be the priority and we are working with Headteachers to support them to achieve this.

School transport will be a key issue for many parents in Northumberland. I would like to reassure you that we are liaising very regularly with our School Transport team to ensure that we put in place a system that compliments the arrangements for potential reopening that your children's school had made. Most of you, who have children in the relevant years should have already received a letter from our school transport team indicating then next steps in relation to securing appropriate transport where needed.

Wellbeing and Community Health Services Group

County Hall, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 2EF

T: 0345 600 6400

www.northumberland.gov.uk

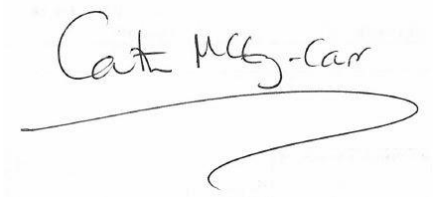
We all know how valuable regular attendance at school is, particularly for the more vulnerable children, and, in supporting our schools to plan for potential reopening, we are paying due regard to the guidance that has been issued by the government, which [includes published support for parents and carers around the reopening of schools](#) and information on key areas of concern. All our schools have undertaken risk assessments since the proposed reopening was announced to ensure that the relevant safety measures are in place to welcome more children back to school. We are supporting school leaders with this important process and are aware that some schools may need additional time to put safety measures in place.

The decision on whether to reopen a school is not straightforward and a whole range of factors will need to be taken into account, including how effectively a school can put some of the social distancing measures in place and whether there is a large proportion of teachers / support staff who are shielded or who are otherwise unable to come into school.

Headteachers and governing bodies will make the right decisions for their school communities. Headteachers do not want their school to be closed for longer than is absolutely necessary but they will put the safety of their pupils and staff first when deciding when their school can start to admit more pupils.

Families should of course check with their child's school for their planned reopening dates.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cath McEvoy-Carr". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a long, horizontal, slightly wavy line that serves as a decorative flourish.

Cath McEvoy-Carr
Executive Director of Adult Social Care & Children's Services

Message from Liz Morgan, Director of Public Health, Northumberland

As a parent, some of your key concerns will be:

- **Is it safe for children returning to school?**
We're confident that children tend to have a milder illness. Deaths in school aged children are tragic but they're rare events and data on deaths from the Office of National Statistics released in May reported only 4 deaths in children aged up to the age of 14yrs. To put that into context, Public Health England has told us that 11 children died of seasonal flu in November / December 2019.
- **Are children likely to spread the disease to adults?**
In the UK at the time of writing, rates of positive cases in children aged 5-9 are 48 times and 153 times lower than people in their 70s and the over 80s respectively. Studies from other countries where they've done wider community testing also supports the conclusion that infection rates in younger children are lower and there's nothing to suggest children transmit the virus any more than adults.
- **What is the risk for school staff?**
The likelihood of dying of COVID in working age adults is still much lower than in people of retirement age. In people in their early 50s, rates are about a third of those in their early 60s and much lower in those who are in their early 40s or early 30s. Any teacher who is in the 'shielded' category, however, will need to remain at home and a risk assessment may be required for those who are in a clinically vulnerable group.

Schools play a key role in promoting children's health, social and mental wellbeing. We know that children who are disadvantaged are the most likely to suffer from not being at school and that their entire life chances are at risk of being harmed, with health inequalities likely to widen for these children the most. Time in school with the routine and opportunities that this offers is essential for a child's own wellbeing.

The decision to reopen a school is, therefore, a balance of risk. Be assured, however, that in reaching a decision, your child's school will have considered:

- Whether it has got the workforce available that is needed to open?
- Are there any critical areas where social distancing cannot be met?
- What is the risk to children and teachers when the school puts all the appropriate measures in place?
- What are the long term consequences for children if they're kept out of school?

There will be other factors to consider. However, as a parent, you will know your child and your child's school best and you are, therefore, best placed to decide whether or not your child returns to school.



Liz Morgan
Director of Public Health