

Education & Learning
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
EX2 4QD

17 June 2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

It is a few weeks since I wrote to you to explain the Devon response to the Government's plans for a wider return to school. Much has changed since then, and I thought an update on the current situation might be helpful.

In planning the return, schools and parents acted with great care, recognising the importance of school for children, educationally and socially, while also making sure that it was as safe as possible for each child to return. 98% of Devon schools are now open and where possible, providing a wider offer to pupils in Early Years, Reception, Year 1 or Year 6. We have double the number of children attending school compared to national, which perhaps isn't so surprising because our rate of infection in the South West, and particularly here in Devon, is much lower than national.

The number of key worker and vulnerable children attending school has also risen. In many schools, twice as many as before half term and in some, three times more.

The offer available in each school is different as it is based on their risk assessment and the needs of the community they serve. For example, if there are a lot of parents who are key workers it may not be possible for a school to open to more children or additional year groups. For our special schools where many of the children are vulnerable, risk assessments also take account of the individual needs of each child and how these can be managed safely alongside others.

Across Devon, the return to school has gone very well, children and families have been happy and so have staff. In fact, the return has been such a success that Devon schools are now facing a different issue.

Class sizes in schools have been halved, in line with national government requirements with a maximum of 15 pupils in each group: these groups are known as bubbles. The bubbles should be kept apart. Schools' risk assessments have determined the maximum number of bubbles in the school. Your child's school will have shared with you what this will be like in your school.

As more pupils return, **some schools may soon be in a position where they are no longer able to offer places to every child who wants one.** Schools will have reached the limits of the physical space available for the bubbles to be maintained safely. Some schools will have reached their maximum staffing capacity. The Government's priority places vulnerable children and those of [keyworkers](#) at the top. It is possible that some schools could reach capacity with these children alone and no longer be able to make an offer to wider year groups.

We appreciate that this might be frustrating for some families, and potentially very difficult for some. If you need support, talk first to your school to explain the circumstances. We want to do everything we can to support families during what is an extraordinarily challenging time for everyone.

Devon's schools will continue to do everything possible to meet parents' need, government guidelines and public health requirements. Safety will always be the top priority. We will continue to work with schools to help find solutions, but **we cannot ask schools to take additional children if it is unsafe for them to do so.**

I have received enquiries from parents about wearing face coverings on school transport and thought this letter was a good opportunity to let you know that, if your child travels:

- **on school transport provided by Devon County Council, Academy Trusts or schools, even if they are over 11, they are not required to wear face coverings.** This is because social distancing measures have been put in place wherever possible and additional cleaning has been put in place following each journey. However, no one will be prevented from wearing a face covering if parents feel their child can use it safely.
- **on public transport (including that paid for by DCC) young people should follow the latest government guidelines which can be [found here](#).** Guidance published on 15.6.20 stated that **children under the age of 11 do not need to wear a face covering**, neither do those with who have a physical or mental health impairment or a disability that means they cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering.

The Government has provided [helpful information for parents](#) on their website which includes a comprehensive Frequently Asked Questions section.

The rapid changes and high degree of uncertainty we are living with can make for a very anxious time for adults and children. Anxiety itself is normal and only becomes a problem when it gets in the way of everyday life. Some children are happy to talk about their worries whilst others find it more difficult and may clam up. There are helpful resources available to support parents and their children on line but I think this [short piece](#) with practical advice is particularly helpful as children return to school. For children who have EHCPs, schools and other involved professionals are working with families to look at how the needs in the plan will be met. More information can be found on the DIAS website: [Devon Independent and Advice Support](#). Young people aged 11-19 can also text a Devon School Nurse on 07520 631 722 for confidential information, advice or support.

Please don't hesitate to talk to your school or any other professional about any concerns you may have.

With very best wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Dawn Stabb
Head of Education & Learning