

## Statement Regarding Wider Reopening of Schools from June 1st

Education and childcare settings are already open to the children of key workers and vulnerable children. The latest guidance asks that:

- Children in the key worker and vulnerable groups are now encouraged to attend if they are not already doing so. Therefore numbers are likely to increase. We are told that all children must be in small groups of no more than 15.
- Schools prepare for children in the early years, F2, Y1 and Y6 to begin a return to school, **no earlier than 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020**. These children must also be in small groups, no more than 15.

All this gives schools on Wirral, and throughout the country, much to consider. Schools will be limited by how many groups of no more than 15 they can accommodate in suitable spaces in schools. For example, a typical Primary school with 7 classrooms plus a hall would only be able to accommodate 8 groups of no more than 15 – a maximum of 120 children; just over half the number of children usually in the school.

Schools will also be limited by the numbers of staff available. Staff who are shielding will not be able to return to school at this point and have been instructed that they must remain working at home. Some schools on Wirral will be greatly affected by this necessary measure.

As children must be in small groups, they may well not be with their own class teacher or all their friends or in their own classroom. The Government guidance says that as far as possible they will need to remain with the same group and the same adult while they are in school. Breaks must be taken in the same small groups and organised so that the children do not mix in larger groups. As a result, playtimes and lunchtimes will need to be different than usual.

Schools will need to carry out additional stringent cleaning everyday so that the spaces and resources that have been used are thoroughly cleaned to reduce the risk of the spread of the virus. This is already happening daily but as numbers increase, there will be more areas and resources to clean. Additional time for cleaning will have to be factored into any arrangements that schools make for the return of more pupils.

We are instructed that all classroom items and resources that cannot be easily cleaned must be put away. Activities must be limited to things that can be cleaned regularly. In early years settings this may change the classroom environment the children are familiar with. For example, there would be no sand, water, playdough or dressing up clothes. We must avoid children sharing resources where we can and if they must share, we need to be able to clean equipment after each use.

So what does this mean for parents on Wirral?

- Children of key workers and vulnerable children must continue to be accommodated first. Schools will then be able to see how many additional children they can care for dependent on spaces and staffing available.

This clearly means that it may not be possible for all children in the early years, F2, Y1 and Y6 to attend at once. We will look carefully at this and consider what provision we can safely offer. It will not be the same for all schools on Wirral – it cannot be as it will depend on the accommodation and staffing available in individual schools.

- In order to be able to allow as many children in the designated year groups to attend school, schools may offer places on a part-time basis or for a certain number of sessions per week.
- School will be different for children returning. The children need to understand that they may not be with their own teacher or in their own classroom as this may not be possible. Routines and systems will be unfamiliar and more formal than usual. They will, however, be well cared for and welcomed by the adult who is working with them.

When the time comes for some children to return, all schools on Wirral will be doing everything we can to follow the guidance issued by the DfE to keep everyone safe. Parents will need to help too:

- You may be given staggered times to arrive at school and to collect children so that schools can try to safely manage this and ensure there is minimal adult contact – 2m distancing between adults must be maintained. Parents must not gather at the school gates when arriving or departing.
- Only one adult can accompany children on to the school site
- Children may be required to wear clean clothes each day to school
- Families must continue to observe the current social distancing guidance out of school and must not be mixing with other households

These are challenging times for us all. Many of you will be anxious to get back to work but many will be worried about sending children back to school. School staff understand and share these anxieties for their own children and families. Wirral schools will do everything we can to respond to the guidance given by the Government but we will also be ensuring that we do this safely. There is no compulsory education at the moment, and parents will not be penalised in any way for choosing to keep their children at home for a little longer. If you feel the time is not right for your children to return, that is your choice.

This initial thinking will develop over the next week or so. Further advice will be given from the Local Authority and the Department for Education and when we are able to share further information with you, we will do this. You will also be aware that professional associations and unions have many concerns and they will be working at local level and national level to resolve these. Until then, the date of June 1<sup>st</sup> is not confirmed but nevertheless, we wanted to share the key points in the guidance we have been given clearly so that you also have time to think about this.