

Date: 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020

Dear Parent/Carer,

The Government has announced that, in England, pupils will return to face-to-face education in school from the 8<sup>th</sup> March. This means that from this date, attendance at school will be mandatory once again. However, there will still be some children that are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) that will continue to stay at home based on medical advice until the shielding restrictions are lifted or reviewed on the 31<sup>st</sup> March. This is part of the Governments wider [four step plan](#) to ease lockdown restrictions in England.

This will bring an end to the national restrictions on school attendance that have been in place since January. We know that these restrictions have been incredibly tough on everyone, particularly for parents/carers that have been supporting their children to access remote education on top of the other social restrictions that you as a family have had to deal with. We want to thank you for everything that you have done to support your child/children through each phase of the pandemic, and we are hopeful that we can now have a positive transition back into our schools. We wanted to write to you ahead of the return to face-to-face education to ensure you have access to all the information you need, and to provide some reassurance should you have concerns.

#### How safe is it for children to return to face-to-face education?

Whilst the UK's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) advised in December 2020 that the opening of schools is likely to have an impact on transmission, it also recognised that the Government would also need to take into account the risks to children's mental health, wellbeing, development, educational attainment and health outcomes from school closure. There are no risk-free options available. Whilst the decision to return to face-to-face education is a decision made by our national Government, we would like to tell you about the situation in Wigan and explain why we believe it is safe for our schools to return to face-to-face education on the 8<sup>th</sup> March.

The rates of COVID-19 in Wigan have reduced significantly from when schools returned after Christmas holidays. In the 7 days prior to the 8<sup>th</sup> January, there were 1,396 cases of COVID-19 amongst residents, a rate of 424.8 per 100,000 people, which at the time, was the highest in Greater Manchester. In the 7 days prior to 24<sup>th</sup> February, there were 573 cases in Wigan, a rate of 174.3 per 100,000 people, which is the fifth-lowest in Greater Manchester. The risk of acquiring COVID-19 within the borough is therefore, at present, significantly lower than at the beginning of January.

The roll out of the vaccination programme has also, nationally, been a huge success. The COVID-19 vaccine ensure that we can keep safe our most elderly or vulnerable residents who are most at risk of serious illness or death from COVID-19. By the 21<sup>st</sup> February, there had been 55,000 vaccines administered to priority residents in Wigan, and a further 16,500 vaccines given to our front-line health and social care staff that are working with our elderly or vulnerable residents. 94% of over 70s and 75% of our clinically extremely vulnerable residents have received their vaccine.

Our schools in Wigan have also been open and providing face-to-face education throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, for our vulnerable children and key workers to all children in school. Our attendance levels have consistently been amongst the highest in Greater Manchester during this period. Our schools are therefore experienced in assessing risk and putting into place control measures to prevent the spread of infection. Our Health Protection Team works closely with schools to ensure they are aware of the latest advice and best practice, and where there have been cases in schools, to support the rapid isolation of contacts and to prevent further spread. Since January, primary schools have also been able to regularly test their staff for COVID-19, which has been helpful in identifying those who have COVID-19 but do not have symptoms.

It is also essential that, until other restrictions are lifted, you ensure your child is following the safety measures outside of school and that they are not mixing in groups in the evening. We want this to be the last time that schools have to restrict attendance and therefore we all need to continue to play our part in doing this by continuing to follow the rules.

It is also important that we all understand that the current measures in school will continue. You must continue to report if your child has or has been in contact with someone that is symptomatic or has tested positive. Isolation for individual pupils and bubbles will continue but we hope that this will be less disruptive with the additional measures in place.

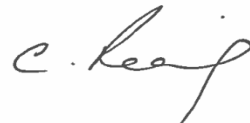
For more information on the return to school, you may wish to visit [the GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk).

We hope that this letter has helped to reassure you about your child's return to face-to-face education and we thank you for your continued support of our schools in these challenging times.

Yours sincerely,



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Director of Public Health



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