

Information for parents on the reopening of schools for Spring Term

There has been considerable national debate on the reopening of schools from the start of the Spring Term.

Secondary age pupils will have a phased return prior to all pupils returning on the 18th January. However, under current legislation all other education establishments (including early years, primary, infant, junior, specialist and alternative provision) are required to reopen fully during the week commencing 4th January.

This is supported by government guidance and recent announcements by both the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Education. All schools have completed health and safety risk assessments.

The latest Covid-19 weekly infection rates for Cambridgeshire and in Peterborough are below both the England average and the East of England average. These rates are updated on a daily basis and both councils monitor them closely. Covid-19 infection rates remain higher in Peterborough than in Cambridgeshire, although are rising more rapidly in Cambridgeshire.

Cambridgeshire County Council has issued advice to schools, following a number of the trade unions representing school staff recommending to their members that they don't attend school due to safety concerns. Unions have further advised that they should only support either remote education or face to face support vulnerable and key worker children who attend schools.

As a result, schools have been asked to establish the impact this might have on being able to deliver education in school.

The county council believes that a blanket closure of schools is not the correct response when taking account of the overall national position and guidance and what is best for pupils. As a result, it has taken the following stance:

1. Where schools are unable to operate safely due to a lack of staff, all maintained schools will be fully supported to make decisions over either partial closure or full closure of the school. Remote learning will be offered to any pupil whose bubble or school is closed. This will be reviewed on a daily basis in line with the school's individual risk assessment.
2. The current Covid-19 situation will be monitored on a bi-weekly basis, at ward and school catchment area. If we determine that there is a high and increasing trend in infection levels equivalent to that in other areas where there has been national direction to close schools, we will seek support from the Department for Education to close the school to all but vulnerable and key worker children. This information will be shared with schools to inform their risk assessments.

The county council wrote to the Regional School Commissioner on the 31st December, to discuss the approach to areas where data around infections suggests there are concerns. A meeting will be taking place this week to discuss the situation in Cambridgeshire.

The preventative measures that educational establishments have put in place have been hugely effective in managing Covid-19 cases and staff have worked relentlessly. The support of parents has also been crucial and they have worked closely with schools to both reduce the spread of the virus and ensure their children are able to continue with their education.

If parents are concerned about the safety of their child returning to their education setting, please speak to school/college leaders for further advice on the precautions they are taking. For school age pupils up to the end of year 11, attendance remains compulsory.

The information in this statement is correct as of today (3rd January) and further updates will be issued in the coming days if needed.

Note

Academy schools are autonomous of the local authority but this advice has been issued to them and it will be for individual academy trusts to decide their position in relation to reopening.

Our advice applies to all education establishments including early years settings and colleges.