

Report of the Cabinet Member Children's Services and Schools

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 23 July 2020:

1. By Councillor Greenslade on:

the readiness of Devon Schools to reopen to all pupils in September and confirm that no financial penalties will be made to parents who still do not feel comfortable about sending children back to school.

Response

In order to ensure the full opening of schools in September is as safe as possible early years settings, schools and colleges have been putting in place proportionate protective measures for children and staff as laid out in the revised DfE guidance.

The first section of this guidance sets out the public health advice schools must follow to minimise the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) transmission. It also includes the process that should be followed if anyone develops coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms while at school. This guidance has been developed with advice from PHE and includes essential measures such as:

- a requirement that people who are ill stay at home
- robust hand and respiratory hygiene
- enhanced cleaning arrangements
- active engagement with NHS Test and Trace
- formal consideration of how to reduce contacts and maximise distancing between those in school wherever possible and minimise potential for contamination so far as is reasonably practicable.

All schools in Devon are undertaking a health and safety risk assessment which reviews how well they have been able to implement the measures. A template has been provided to help Devon schools do this. The template has been agreed by DCS's health and safety, public health, HR and legal and insurance teams. It has also been shared with unions.

The government has said that all children and young people, in all year groups, will return to school and college full time from the beginning of the autumn term and that attendance will be mandatory. This is because the prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased since schools and colleges restricted their opening in March, the NHS test and trace service is up and running and more is understood about the measures that need to be in place to create safer environments in schools.

For parents and carers of children of compulsory school age, this means that the legal duty to provide their child with an education will apply. In Devon, schools and the Local Authority will work with parents to support children back into schools and where children are not able to attend school, as parents are following medical and/or public health advice, the absence will not be penalised. We also recognise that children and young people returning to school and college is not only important for their educational progress but also for their wellbeing, and wider development.

James McInnes
Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools